MISS QUILLET

BY

S. BARING GOULD

J. A. D. BRIDGER,
BOOKSELLER, NEW & SECOND-HAND,
MARKET JEW ST., PENZANCE.

MISS QUILLET

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

MEHALAH
IN THE ROAR OF THE SEA
THE QUEEN OF LOVE
CHEAP JACK ZITA
MRS. CURGENVEN OF CURGENVEN
ARMINELL
JACQUETTA
URITH
KITTY ALONE
MARGERY OF QUETHER
NOEMI
THE BROOM-SQUIRE
DARTMOOR IDYLLS
GUAVAS THE TINNER
THE PENNYCOMEQUICKS
BLADYS
DOMITIA
PABO, THE PRIEST
WINEFRED
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SHE RESEATED HERSELF BY THE FIRE

MISS QUILLET

BY

S. BARING-GOULD

WITH EIGHT ILLUSTRATIONS BY G. GRENVILLE MANTON

METHUEN & CO.
36 ESSEX STREET W.C.
LONDON
1902

Edinburgh: T. and A. CONSTABLE, (late) Printers to Her Majesty

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MISS QUILLET

CHAPTER I

SEND HER

'CAN send no trained nurse. All engaged. Probationer alone available, if no infectious case. Wire if required.'

Mr. Tolcher, the surgeon, held the telegram in his hands and read it aloud to Mrs. Basileg.

'What is to be done?' inquired the latter.

'That is for you to determine,' answered the medical man.

'Not at all, I put the matter entirely in your hands. It is an awful nuisance. Why cannot they send us a properly qualified nurse?'

'The telegram does not inform us further than that all such are engaged. I know as much or as little as yourself. But I can guess that on account of the epidemic of influenza raging, there has been an extra-

ordinary call for nurses, and the available staff has been sent out.'

'And what if I were to have the flue!' exclaimed the lady. 'That would be a condition of affairs appalling to contemplate. My poor brother in one room, I in another, and no proper nurse to attend either of us.'

'I think that we need not consider such a contingency till it arises.'

'On the contrary, it is a contingency that must be provided against, with the microbes of influenza all about us, in the air. That which constitutes a great general is his being able to foresee dangers and make provision against them. A successful man of business is he who looks ahead to commercial booms and crashes, and provides accordingly.'

'But at the present moment, we have not to concern ourselves with such an eventuality, which may never occur, as your having the influenza, madam; but we have to find a suitable nurse for Mr. Marmaduke.'

'A suitable nurse, precisely. But it is proposed to shuffle us off with a raw probationer.'

'Shall I wire to another institution?' asked Mr. Tolcher.

'It may be out of stock as well,' said Mrs. Basileg.

'And then,' remarked the surgeon. 'When we have failed there, and return to that which promises us something, if not quite what we want, we may find that we are too late—she has been snapped up.'

'It is really maddening,' said the lady. 'Could not one of the experienced nurses be withdrawn from an influenza patient, and the novice sent to take her place?'

'To arrange that would take time. Moreover, I do not for a moment suppose that the matron would consent to such a proposal. One of two things must be done—either take what we are offered or apply elsewhere.'

'We must find some one,' said Mrs. Basileg. 'I am not sure that I can stay much longer here. Indeed, I know that I cannot. I was hurried away from home at a most awkward and inopportune moment. We are losing our cook. I have advertised for one, and I have answered several who have advertised for places. I have further sent several half-crowns to registration offices. I really am bound to be at home.'

'Judging by experience in such cases,' said the surgeon, 'I should say that your advertisements will meet with no replies, and that those which you have answered will also prove sterile. As to the registration

agents, they will send you a list of eligible decoys, not one of whom will respond to your request that she should communicate with you.'

'So much the greater reason that I should be at home. Really it is most vexatious my brother blowing himself up at this juncture. Why should he dabble in chemical studies? He has his legal work to attend to, and ought not to engage in pursuits that do not touch his profession.'

'With this question, madam, we have not to concern ourselves. We have him here on our hands, his eyes seriously injured by an explosion, and he requires the most careful, conscientious, and exact attention if his eyesight is to be preserved. Negligence might lead to most disastrous results. I regret, as sincerely as yourself, that no properly trained and certificated nurse is procurable—but we must take matters as we find them, when we are powerless to alter them. We must shape our conduct accordingly. Shall I wire to the matron to send this young woman, or shall I try elsewhere?'

'I leave the responsibility with you.'

The surgeon made a gesture of impatience.

She was one of those women who can raise difficulties and obstruct action, and who shirk taking a step to help out of complications.

'I cannot be much longer here,' began Mrs. Basileg again.

'But you arrived only this morning!'

'I travelled all night. I came away at the greatest personal inconvenience. I must return home, my securing a cook depends on it.'

'And your brother's eyesight depends on how he is nursed. Surely this is a superior consideration.'

'It is not as though the cook were for me only—I have my husband and his comforts to think of. He is at business all day, and when he returns expects to dine well. I must have a cook, and how am I to secure one when away from home, and mewed up in a sick-room?'

'Then I shall wire.'

'It is monstrous that my brother should be committed to the inexperienced hands of a giddy girl. If a probationer, then she must be that. And so much depending on his retaining his eyesight!' continued Mrs. Basileg. 'Richard is not well off; he has very little of his own, and must earn his liveli-

hood. He has sunk most of his capital in the purchase of a partnership. If he loses his sight, how is he to go on with his work?'

'What am I to do, Mrs. Basileg?' asked the surgeon, biting his lip with vexation. 'It is for you to decide.'

'Polly cannot be with Richard by night and by day,' replied the lady. 'The cook is not the fit person to answer the bell, when inquirers come to ask how my brother is. She is not tidy enough. Besides, who is to dust the furniture, lay the fires, bring up coal, do the general house-work, if Polly be turned into nurse?'

'Really, Mrs. Basileg, I must ask you to come to some decision. My time is valuable.'

'So also is mine. Here am I away from home, whilst applications for my situation are arriving. I cannot inquire into the characters and capabilities of cooks, here in Westport.'

'Then this I will do. I will wire to two additional institutions, and let you know the results.'

'That is best. I am not going to have an empty-headed coquette here to nurse my brother.'

Mr. Marmaduke was a man of three-and-

thirty, who had bought a partnership in a firm of solicitors in a county town, and this firm had opened a branch office at Westport, a rapidly growing watering-place. From boyhood he had been interested in science generally, but more especially in chemistry, and he had maintained this partiality as he grew to manhood.

Such of his time as could be spared from his professional duties he spent in his laboratory, and of late he had been experimentalising in fulminants, with the result that an explosion had occurred which had so seriously affected his vision that he was now confined to a darkened chamber, with bandages over his eyes, and it was as yet uncertain whether he would recover their use.

Directly the accident had occurred, the local surgeon had telegraphed to Mr. Marmaduke's sister in London, and she had immediately come down, but with a protest in her mouth, that she was unable to remain in charge for any length of time.

Happily Richard Marmaduke possessed a couple of capable and willing servants; the house-parlourmaid, Polly, readily undertook to nurse him provisionally till a more competent person could be found. She was a

good-natured but not a brilliant girl, and Mr. Tolcher was alive to the necessity for having in charge of his patient a woman of more experience and riper intelligence to take her place, and allow Polly to resume her household duties.

Mrs. Basileg had not improved the situation by her arrival on the scene. She had sensibly increased the difficulties not only by constituting another person in the house to be attended to, but also by her manner.

She expected her meals to be well served and to be of good quality. She required a bedroom for herself, and that a fire should be maintained in it by day, and be made up for the night. She did not volunteer to sit up with her brother the ensuing night, but then she had passed it in the train and required rest. When in her brother's room, to which she paid irregular visits, she did not remain there for long. She rang for Polly to relieve her—she had a letter to write or some necessary shopping to do, as she had left home in a hurry and insufficiently provided with toilette requirements. Nor was her presence with the patient conducive to repose. She fidgeted about the room, talked, asked questions, yawned, poked the

fire, and comported herself in such a manner as to irritate nerves that were rendered peculiarly sensitive through pain. Moreover, her manner towards the servants was such as to rouse their opposition. They had, doubtless, been treated over indulgently by a master who did not exact much, and they felt keenly the descent among them of a woman who was peculiarly exacting, and supercilious in demeanour towards them.

Mr. Tolcher returned after an absence of three hours.

'Well?' asked Mrs. Basileg.

'It is Hobson's choice,' he replied. 'We must accept the probationer or have none at all. Both the institutions with which I have communicated have proved unable to send a nurse. One answers, "None available," and the other, "Impossible."'

'Really,' said Mrs. Basileg, 'I do wish that Richard had taken up with some other pursuit than chemistry, which always blows people up sooner or later.'

'Madam, it is in vain to wish—we must act.'

'It is all nonsense,' exclaimed the angry lady. 'You can't go in a 'bus, or on the Metropolitan Railway, but you encounter nurses or art students; they swarm thick as

midges in autumn. Where are they all now? I mean the nurses, not the art students.'

'They are not at the hospitals and institutions to which I have applied,' said Mr. Tolcher.

'No, they are everywhere but where wanted, rushing about with their veils flying behind them, like mosquitoes.'

'Perhaps, madam, you might go to Portland Road station, and catch one of these vagrants, and bring her here. Come, what is to be done?'

'I would gladly offer to nurse Richard myself,' pursued Mrs. Basileg; 'but that I am a bundle of nerves, and am liable to headaches. Besides, there is that dominating question of a cook, that must be solved—it fills my horizon!'

'Do you then authorise me to wire for the probationer?'

'I won't take that responsibility on my shoulders.'

'Very well, madam, I shall wire, "SEND HER."'

CHAPTER II

MY LITTLE GIRL

A DAPPER little nurse skipped out of the train, when it drew up at the Westport station, and ran along the platform in quest of her box.

'Here you are, miss!' said a porter. 'The luggage is at the back of the train.'

'Get me a cab,' demanded the little woman.

'Very sorry, miss,' replied the porter, 'but there is a party just engaged the only one. There was another, but the snow balled under the 'oss's feet, and down he come and broke the shaft. So there 's only one now, and that 's took.'

'What is to be done?'

'If you don't mind waitin' a minute, miss. If the box ain't too big, I daresay I can wheel it for you. Where do you want to go?'

'To Mr. Marmaduke's.'

'Oh! the gen'l'man as blowed hisself up! All right. You bide here till I 'm free. I 'll be at your service directly. I 've got a barrow. Is that your box? Quillet is the name on it.'

'Yes, my name is Quillet.'

'Right you are. I 'll set it back against the side, out of the way. You go into the first-class waiting-room and warm yourself at the fire, and I 'll be with you as soon as I am free.'

The nurse did as advised. There was no alternative that she could see.

She was pretty, with sparkling brown eyes, a bright colour, and glossy dark hair with a curl breaking out from under her bonnet.

The costume of a nurse is becoming, and possibly Miss Quillet was not unaware that she was an attractive personage. She certainly found that good looks went a long way towards making porters, guards, and station-masters civil towards her. She seated herself in front of a good coal fire, and put her feet on the fender, where her boots began to steam. The weather was cold. The land was dumb with snow, and the breath on the carriage-windows had formed into frost-flowers.

'Well!' remarked Miss Quillet to herself, 'what will the sisters say to this junket, when I tell them of it? I hope I shall have larks.'

'I am your servant,' said the porter, looking in. 'So sorry to disturb you, miss, from a nice fire, but I haven't much time before the up train starts. The box is all right — on the barrow outside the station.'

'Have we far to go?' asked the nurse.

'Not a terrible sight of a way; but there 's a lot of snow about, and more has been falling all the afternoon. That makes slow travelling. You want to go to Mr. Marmaduke's house, and not to the office, I suppose.'

'Certainly. I have been sent for. I know nothing of the particulars. Who is Mr. Marmaduke?'

'Oh! he 's a lawyer.'

'A lawyer!' repeated Miss Quillet, and she screwed up her mouth. 'A lawyer!' in a dissatisfied tone.

'He 's a very nice gentleman,' said the porter, starting with his load; 'and we 're all very sorry for what has happened to him.'

'What has happened? I know nothing.

A telegram came to the institution, summoning a nurse, but no particulars were given.'

'Well, miss! He blowed hisself up and blowed in his eyes. We had an explosion on an oil-ship in harbour last year, and it smashed half the windows in Westport. I'm the more sorry for the gentleman, because my own little girl is bad in her eyes.'

'Gunpowder?' asked the nurse.

'No, miss! scarlet fever,' replied the man, misunderstanding the reference. 'You see, my wife is dead, and I've only my little girl at home, and she was took with the fever. I couldn't be always with her, I had to be at the station, and whether she took cold, or how it came about I can't say, but it has left her eyes bad, and she can't hardly see. What will be the end of it God only knows.'

'But Mr. Marmaduke,' said the nurse, not much interested in the porter's domestic affairs, and desirous of learning something about the person to whom she was sent; 'this case is one of an explosion, you say.'

'Yess, miss! playing with doctor's stuff —chemicals. It went off into his face and

eyes—that's about it. I'm sorry for him. I feels it all the more, because of my little girl.'

'But, putting your little girl for the moment on one side,' said Miss Quillet, 'I should like to know more of Mr. Marmaduke. When did this occur?'

'Yesterday sometime. I can't exactly give you the time of day when it happened.'

'And Mrs. Marmaduke sought the assistance of a nurse?'

'There is no Mrs. Marmaduke.'

'Is he not married?'

'No, miss. He's not an elderly man—about five-and-thirty, I take it. He lives by himself at some distance from the office. May be three-quarters of a mile away. They do tell us, miss,'—the porter halted and wiped his brow. It was heavy work trundling the barrow through the new-fallen snow. 'They do say, miss, that we are all made alike by Nature, but it's hard to believe it. For gentlemen have livers and labouring men haven't.'

'Of course they have.'

'I don't hold by that,' pursued the porter, going forward with his barrow. 'What working men look out to live three-quarters of a

mile from their work unless they can't help it? Gentlefolks make a point of it.' He paused again. 'Then, miss, did you ever hear of the lab'ring classes spending their money in saline draughts? and when did you ever hear of the 'ard-'anded sons of toil refuse pork-pies and sausage-rolls? Gentlefolks can't touch 'em because they have got livers. Now my little girl——'

'But Mr. Marmaduke.'

'Yes, miss, I've seen him take one of them hot pork pasties as they provide at the refreshment-rooms at all stations, and try it. But he couldn't get through with it. But my little girl and me—we can manage all the stale ones. Miss Palmer, that's the lady at the refreshment bar, she gives us what is over and too old for sale, and we enjoys 'em, my little girl and me.'

'Is that a river or a canal?' asked Miss Quillet, pointing to a strip of grey ice.

'It's a bit of both,' replied the porter; 'but there ain't no skating on it now. There came a thaw, and then the snow, and roughened it. Do you see that light yonder? That is where Mr. Marmaduke lives. It's the last house this side of the town. The gentleman likes to be in the

country. This place is growing tremendously fast. What is fields to-day will be villas by summer. That is why Mauger and Marmaduke have a branch here. Bad for the gentleman if he goes blind. My little girl——'

'Oh yes, it will spoil his prospects.'

'What ever would become of my little girl if I were took away, I can't think, and she as good as blind. You see, my wife has been dead some years. Mr. Marmaduke is a gentleman, and has money of his own, and friends; but me and my little girl has nothing but my weekly wage. What could she do for her livelihood — having bad eyes?'

'That, then, is Mr. Marmaduke's house?'

'Yes, miss, and here is the door. I'll carry in your box and take it upstairs for you if you wish.'

'Oh no, thank you. As there is sickness in the house, the maids will manage that with less noise. Here is half a crown.'

'No, thank you, all the same, miss. If you wouldn't mind instead, as you're a hospital nurse, just stepping round and having a look at my little girl's eyes.'

'But I am only a probationer—I know

nothing of the art and science of an oculist.'

'They 've sent for you to Mr. Marmaduke as is bad in his eyes, so you must have a look at those of my daughter, and pass an opinion on them.'

'My opinion is worth nothing.'

'You 're modest, miss. All the same, thanking you kindly, I should value it more than the half-crown. If you wouldn't mind calling, miss, when you have a bit of leisure. My name is Thomas.'

'Christian or surname?'

'Both. My father and mother were so in love with the name, that they christened me Thomas, and I am Thomas Thomas. My little girl was baptized and called Thomasine.'

The porter rang the house-bell, and lifted the box from off the barrow on to his shoulder.

Next moment the door was opened, and the light from a lamp in the passage streamed forth over the snow.

'You 'll step around, and have a look in when you have a moment of time, will you not, miss? I should like you to see my little girl's eyes and pass an opinion upon them.'

'I will do so if I possibly can.'

'Thank you, miss. I 'll hold you to it. No, miss, no money for me. I 'll take your call instead.'

Then he touched his cap, and trundled his barrow away.

CHAPTER III

MRS. BASILEG

WHEN the door was shut after the porter had taken the box into the hall, the servant-girl said, 'Beg pardon—but be you a nurse come to attend to master?'

'Yes, I am. Were you not expecting me?'

'Well, miss, Mrs. Basileg never told cook nor me nothing about it,' said the maid. 'But I'm main glad. He do want some one to be with him. Me and cook do our best, but we can't be always in his room. He's a good master. Will you step into the parlour for a minute. Mrs. Basileg—she have upset us. And cook have been sittin' cryin' in the scullery all along of her.'

'Who is Mrs. Basileg?'

'His sister. Cook and me sat up last night, taking turns about, and I dare say we could manage between us, only Mrs. Basileg comes from London, and she wants more

"COOK SHE DIDN'T MAKE THE POTATOES, SHE ONLY MASHED 'EM"

attending to than the master. And she did fly out because cook sent up the cutlets with mashed potatoes, and there were lumps in the potatoes. You see, miss, at this time of the year, they ain't what they ort to be, but cook she didn't make the potatoes, she only mashed 'em. And when I 'm dressin' for the afternoon, she rings for me to clean her boots, or she wants a letter taken to the post just as I 'm layin' table. She 's a trying woman—lady, I mean.'

'I presume that Mrs. Basileg sent for me.'

'She or the doctor, that is, Mr. Tolcher. But she might have told me to prepare for you. There 's no sheets aired and nothing ready. But perhaps you 'll sit up to-night with the master, and I 'll get the room ready for you by to-morrow. Have you come from far, miss?'

'Two hours by express.'

'And in such cold weather. You 'll want a cup of tea and some hot toast and a couple of eggs, and I 'll see if cook can do you a chop. I 'd sit up willingly with master, but I 've a bad memory, and Doctor Tolcher tells me what I have to do, and it goes out of my head. I get deadly frightened lest I should neglect something. I 'm willing enough, but I 'm no scholar, and I can't

mind all that is said. If Mrs. Basileg hadn't come, we'd have done our best, and Dr. Tolcher is very kind. There—she's calling! I thought she would. She heard the front door open, and the man come in with your box.'

Then the good-natured girl ran out of the sitting-room and responded—'Yes, ma'am!'

'Is that the nurse arrived? Where is she?' asked a hard voice from the landing. 'What do you mean by not coming upstairs at once and informing me?'

Mary, the house-parlourmaid, ascended the staircase and explained. Thereupon the lady herself came down, opened the parlour door, entered, and halted to make inspection of the nurse.

'Too young! a great deal too young!' was her salutation.

Miss Quillet, nettled at the reception, answered tartly, 'I have certainly my summer days before me, instead of behind my back.'

'Indeed!'

Mrs. Basileg opened her eyes wide and contemplated the new arrival sternly.

'Utterly inexperienced, I take it.'

'I am not fully qualified, that is true. But the matron told me that she had

explained the situation, and that you had elected to take me *quand même*.'

'She may have done so, nurse; but the communication was made, not to me, but to the medical attendant.'

She laid an emphasis on the word nurse.

'Then the doctor knew the circumstances, and considered that I would answer his purpose.'

'The responsibility lies with him, nurse.'

'I suppose so.'

'I suppose so!' repeated Mrs. Basileg, flaring up. 'Do you know, nurse, whom you are addressing? Do you properly estimate your position? I am the sister of Mr. Marmaduke, who has met with an accident. I have taken over the charge of the house, and so long as I am here—I am the mistress. As such, I expect to be addressed respectfully—as madame or ma'am. You are a salaried official, and from the moment that you enter our door you are in our pay.'

'I beg your pardon. I shall receive nothing from you. Whatever you may have to pay goes—not to me, but to the institution to which I belong.'

'You are here on sufferance.'

'I supposed as a necessity.'

'On sufferance, nurse, and conditionally. Whilst you are here, to me as mistress of the establishment, proper deference must be paid.'

'Mais, madame, vous êtes exigeante.'

'What do you mean by addressing me in French?'

'You desired to be addressed with a title of respect. En français, toute femme est madame, même la blanchisseuse.'

An explosion was prevented only by the entry of Mr. Tolcher.

'Ah! you have arrived!' exclaimed he, holding out his hand to Miss Quillet. 'I thought to find you here shortly after the arrival of the express. Well — there is a case for you that will require all your attention. I know how you nurses love genuine hard cases.'

'Mr. Tolcher!' began Mrs. Basileg; 'I have been insulted, grossly so, by this person whom you have thrust upon me against my judgment.'

'I beg your pardon,' said the surgeon; 'you desired to have a nurse.'

'A nurse, yes—but not a novice, and not one who does not know her place, and one, moreover, just released from the nursery.'

'I am very sorry if anything has hap-

pened to annoy you—what else could be done. Nurse, you had better get Polly to show you to your room, take off your bonnet and cloak, and change your boots, which must be soaked. Then get some refreshment.'

Miss Quillet slightly bowed and departed.

'What is the matter?' then asked the doctor. 'What has she said or done?'

'She gives herself prodigious airs. These nurses all do it. I have no patience with them. As soon as they don their absurd costume they think themselves our equals. She is no lady, and yet she coolly addresses me as one on her own level. I know what these nurses are.'

'You have had, I presume, a profound acquaintance with them.'

'I know the stuff of which they are made. Girls, nowadays, rush into hospitals for the sake of the uniform, which is supposed to be becoming, and their sole object is to have an opportunity for flirting with the doctors and medical students, and eventually for entangling desirable patients in their toils and making them marry them. This minx thinks herself pretty.'

'I should say that she is decidedly good looking.'

'Oh! you men think of nothing but a pair of ogling eyes and an engaging smile. I will not allow my brother to be exposed to her machinations.'

'You forget, he cannot see.'

'That affords no protection. Would that I were able to remain here and nurse him myself. But I cannot, I must see after securing a cook. However, my husband has a sister who is devoted to good works and all that sort of thing, and I will entreat her to come here, and get rid of the most objectionable young female. Good gracious me! she dared to address me in French. I was so taken aback that I did not catch precisely what she said—but I am convinced it was a piece of impertinence.'

'Then I think, madam, the sooner you see your sister-in-law the better.'

'I think so too; but before I go, I will pack this hussy out of the house.'

'My dear madam, you cannot do it.'

'Cannot! I am, I presume, for the time being, mistress of this house.'

'It was I who summoned you here, not you me. I was called in by Mr. Marmaduke to manage his case. I have undertaken it. If I were to order for him a certain treatment, and you objected, I should have to

disregard your objections. I insist that it is necessary for him to have proper nursing. You have assured me repeatedly, that you cannot remain here to look after your brother. That being the case, I call in a nurse, and she shall remain here to carry out my directions.'

'Who, then, is master of the house? You! I will go to Richard at once and insist on his committing full powers to me.'

'He is not in a condition to be aggravated by contentions such as these. The nurse remains.'

'Then I wash my hands of the whole business. If I had in the least supposed that I was to be treated as I have been by you, by the servants, by this chit of a nurse, wild horses would not have drawn me from my home to Westport.'

'Madam, do not let there be unpleasantness between us. I know nothing of this nurse. She may be competent or she may not. If you can induce your sister-in-law to come here and look after Mr. Marmaduke, I shall be most happy. The sooner she comes the better.'

'I will send her. But this probationer will crow, thinking that she has got the better of me.'

'Take my advice, madam,' said Mr. Tolcher; 'you cannot mortify a person of the kind that you suppose this nurse to be, more than by leaving her severely alone. Take no notice of her, avoid every occasion of encountering her, and depart without exchanging a word with her.'

'I believe you are right—it will be a galling snub. Yet—these creatures are pachydermatous.'

'A woman always knows how best to wound another woman,' said Mr. Tolcher sarcastically. 'Allow me to order a cab to take you away to-morrow morning by the nine twenty-eight.'

CHAPTER IV

A TRUST

WHEN Mrs. Basileg was gone from the room, Mr. Tolcher rang and asked Mary to expedite the nurse to him.

Miss Quillet came at once. She had divested herself of her travelling garments, and had donned her nurse's cap. She looked prettier in this than in her bonnet.

'Nurse,' said the surgeon, 'what has been the ruffle between you and Mrs. Basileg.'

'She hectored, and I rebelled.'

'Well, try to keep the peace. The case we have to deal with is delicate. I shall give you instructions which I shall expect you to comply with scrupulously. Mr. Marmaduke has met with an accident which jeopardises his eyesight. Neglect or mismanagement may deprive him of it for ever. You understand me?'

'Perfectly.'

'He is in bed. I have ordered him there, as bandages and compresses can best be retained in place on his eyes when he is in a recumbent position. Moreover, he is by no means free from fever. You will have to keep the compresses moist with a lotion upstairs, to wet them every two hours, or at a less interval if required. On no account whatsoever may light be admitted to his eyes. It is essential that he should be kept in darkness. There is a fire in his room, but I charge you to retain it at a red glow and not allow it to flame. No lamp, and no daylight must be admitted into the room and suffered to reach his eyes. He is, as I have said, feverish, and in considerable pain; at times is light-headed. In his sleep he might pluck at the bandages. He will not do this when he is awake—but there is an agonising fire in his eyeballs, and you must keep a watch upon him if at all inclined to be delirious. The more he sleeps, the better for him. Do not suffer him to talk more than is absolutely necessary, as he must not be excited. You understand me?'

'Yes. How long am I to be shut up in the dark with him?'

'How long?' asked the surgeon in surprise. 'How long? why, of course, as long as is necessary.'

'Will he be many days in this condition?'

'No doubt about it. I shall visit him every morning and evening, and see how he progresses,' said the surgeon, looking the nurse full in the face. 'You have your rules. You know what hours are allowed to you for rest and exercise. Whilst you are out of the dark room, Mary—or Polly, as we are accustomed to call her—will take your place. She is a good and faithful girl, and can do what is required when Mrs. Basileg is away.'

'She is leaving?'

'Yes, to-morrow.'

'That is a relief.'

'Perhaps so. We do not desire to put more on the maids than is absolutely necessary. Mary will see that all your requirements be supplied. Now attend me upstairs.'

He led the way, and Miss Quillet followed.

The house was small, run up by a speculative builder as one of a row of semi-detached villas, in pairs; each block the counterpart of the next. Each house

had a bay window for the drawing-room, that let the water in through the ceiling; and had plate glass, through which those passing outside could see all that took place within. Each had a narrow front door, with a fan-light above it, and strips of coloured and ground glass down the sides, through which the passage, or hall, obtained its light.

The dining-room, with an alcove for the sideboard, was on one side of the lobby, the drawing-room on the other, and behind the latter was the study. The passage was furnished with an iron umbrella-stand in which caught the maid's petticoats when she brought in the tray with meals. A steep staircase, narrow, the steps very high, ascended to the upper story, but turned half-way up, where was a recess with a window and a landing. Here it was designed that the lodgers should keep a stock of sickly ferns.

The upper floor had four doors opening from the landing, each of deal, stained treacle colour and varnished, and set within Oxford frames of the same material and complexion.

The kitchen was in the basement, and was so contrived as to diffuse the savour

of cooking, especially of boiled cabbage, throughout the house, and to leave it there as something not to be got rid of without creating a draught on every story.

Mr. Tolcher entered the sickroom, and admitted the nurse.

Within all was dark. No other light was allowed there, save the rosy glow of a coal fire—the coal mixed with coke to prevent it from bursting into flame. A screen was drawn between the fireplace and the bed, which was in shadow, and the reflection was thrown upon the ceiling.

The window blinds were down, of dark blue-grey material, but there were no curtains, and, indeed, no rods to receive them.

As far as Miss Quillet could see, all the appointments were of the simplest description. As Mr. Marmaduke was a bachelor, he was indifferent to luxury and ornament. His bedchamber was not cumbered with superfluous draperies. It was indeed carpeted, and there was a mat at the wash-hand stand. On the dressing-table was a mahogany looking-glass that partook of the infirmity inherent in such articles. It had waxed loose at the pivot, and swung forward so as to hide its

reflecting surface. There were no pictures on the walls, there was no bookcase. The room was, to the eyes of a woman, bare to baldness.

Miss Quillet took all in, as her eyes became accustomed to the darkness, and she stood aside waiting whilst the surgeon attended to his patient.

When he had done, he came to her, drew her towards the window, and gave her the necessary directions. As soon as he had finished, she ventured to say, 'May I be allowed to write one line home, and will you be good enough to post it for me on your way into the town. I shall detain you two minutes.'

'Certainly I will. Polly will attend here till you are ready.'

Then she descended the stairs and, finding a blotting-book, ink and paper in the study, she wrote this :—

'Dear Vic and Flossie,—A ghastly bother! I wish I had never gone into this nursing affair. Never, never do you be beguiled into it. I rushed in after a sensation, and to shuffle off domestic worries upon your shoulders. I should have returned long ago, but was ashamed to do

so, lest I should be laughed at. Fancy! I have been sent to attend to a snuffy old solicitor—'

('No,' said she, 'this is not quite true. He is not yet forty. However, it shall stand, it helps to pile up the agony.')

Then she proceeded—

'who has damaged his eyes by his own stupidity. I shall have to sit with him night and day, in a dark room bare as my hand, without even little china dogs and pigs, and feather cocks and hens, and plush monkeys on the dressing-table. Nothing, nothing in the room but a lather-brush and a pair of razors and a shaving tidy, and I am going to ask to have the razors removed lest I should go mad and cut my throat. Girls! girls! whatever you do, don't become nurses. I shall chuck the whole thing when I come out. Love to the dad.—Your affectionate sister, ANNE QUILLET.'

'Here is the letter,' said she, as she handed it to the surgeon.

He stood, looking at her questioningly for a moment, and then said abruptly, 'I don't like that.'

'Do not like what?'

'What you said on coming into the sickroom.'

'What was that?'

'You asked how long you would have to be in there.'

'It is not a particularly attractive chamber.'

'That is not it. A nurse, if she is worth her salt, thinks of her patient and not of herself. Do not disappoint me.'

'Remember I am only a probationer.'

'You are on your probation, then, now. I leave a most important trust in your hands —mind, nurse, it is a trust.'

CHAPTER V

IN THE DARK ROOM

ANNE was alone with the sick man.

He was asleep, under the influence of a drug administered by the surgeon.

For a considerable period he lay motionless; but presently ensued a paroxysm of restlessness. He moaned, turned his head from side to side on the pillow, and made attempts to withdraw his arms from under the bedclothes, and, when one hand was released, to pluck at his bandages. But Anne ascertained that he possessed sufficient consciousness, even when in a comatose condition, to refrain from so doing, if she laid her hand upon his shoulder and spoke in remonstrance.

After one of these fits of tossing had passed, and he relapsed into comparative quiet, broken only by moans, Anne seated herself by the fire, put her feet on the fender, laid her hands on her knees, and fell to musing.

How would she be able to endure a prolonged watch lasting many hours, without a novel, without even a newspaper? In herself she had no resources.

She looked into the glowing cinders, but could build up no castles out of them. She endured for a quarter of an hour, and then could endure no longer. Her patience was exhausted. She took the pincers and rearranged the coals and coke in the grate. This, however, did not satisfy her.

She sat on for a while and sighed—a sigh that was half a yawn. Then she stood up and looked at the sleeper.

The light from the fire sufficed to enable her to study her patient. He had a shaven face, excepting only the upper lip, which bore a dark moustache. His features were well formed, the nose straight. The lips were parched and swollen with fever. The face was hardly that she would have associated with a lawyer, she said to herself. Then she sauntered, careful to walk noiselessly, towards the window, and ventured to slightly raise the blind, so as to be able to look at what was without.

Although the world was wrapt in night, nevertheless the snow showed under the stars, scratched, scored, and blotted here

and there with what she conjectured to be hedges, roads, and bushes. The house stood on the confines of the town, and had no dwellings to face it on the opposite side of the street. The only artificial light she could discern proceeded from a remote gas-lamp.

The prospect was not engaging, and supplied no food for thought, so Anne Quillet dropped the blind, and looked round the room.

Anne had never been wont to spend time by herself. She had lived with her father, the Hon. Colonel Quillet, and her sisters, with whom she was on the best of terms. The girls were always together, either in their house at home or abroad, in the drawing-room, in their bedrooms, on the golf links, or the racquet court.

Anne was not a newspaper reader—what knowledge she had of passing events in the political world she gathered from the conversation of those she met in society. She never read telegrams concerning the war, leading articles, political speeches—nothing in the journals save notices of society movements, and reports of hunts. What information concerning general matters she gathered was got as Boyet obtained his

waggery. 'This fellow pecks up wit, as pigeons peas.'

It was a new experience to her to be solitary, an experience for which she was unfurnished.

There are certain persons who are never in such good company as when alone; but such are they who have laid up a store of material from reading, and who have in themselves an unfailing wellspring of ideas. There are others who are deficient in spontaneity, and are impressed, and take shape, and are fed with emotions from without, like a football that is susceptible to kicks, but has no source of activity within. To be alone, to have nothing to distract her mind, nothing to amuse her, was intolerable to Anne.

She took up the patient's comb and brush and examined them for lack of something else to do. She even pulled the strop out of its case, and strained her eyes to read the printed directions how it was to be used that were pasted on the sheath.

She endeavoured to see herself in the looking-glass. After having propped up the swinging and reversed mirror with a candlestick, she contemplated herself there-

in, but as the light was behind her, could see nothing of her features.

Then she went to the wash-stand, to investigate the soap, to ascertain its quality and kind, to make sure whether it were brown Windsor, almond or glycerine, as also by application to her nose, to detect with what it was scented.

A turning and tossing of the patient recalled her to the bed. It was of brass, a half-tester. An eider-down coverlet was thrown over the suffering man, and Anne chanced to notice a rent in it through which the fine plumes were breaking forth. She had no needle and thread with her or she might have occupied herself in darning the hole; but such a thought did not occur to her. She was unaccustomed to needlework. When any of her garments required to be taken in hand she sent them to a seamstress. Till they were too unfit to wear—she fastened them together with pins.

Weary with inaction, she wandered about the room looking at the paper and noting where the junction of the pattern was incorrect, and where, through deficiency of paste, the edges were turned up and frayed.

'How shall I pass the time?' she sighed.

She re-seated herself by the fire, only again, after a few minutes of rest, to find that the fit of the fidgets was upon her once more.

'I must have something to read—even if I burn my eyes out over it,' she said, and went to the chest of drawers. It occurred to her that probably the drawers had been lined with sheets of old newspapers. These might, and assuredly did, contain stale information. They might be stuffed with nothing other than advertisements, but anything, even these, would be better than having nothing to look at, nothing to occupy her mind.

She had pulled out the upper drawer, and was removing a sheet of printed paper from it, when she heard the patient inquire, 'Who is there?'

'It is I, your nurse.'

'It is not Polly. You have not her tread nor her voice. Who, then, are you?'

'A nurse sent for by your doctor.'

'What is your name?'

'I am Miss Quillet.'

'But your Christian name?' asked further the patient.

'You cannot require to know that.'

'You forget. I am blind. I must frame to myself a conception of what my nurse is like. Every name carries with it a type to my mind.'

'Well, I was baptized by the name of Anne. What do you suppose I am like?'

'I cannot say that my notion of an Anne agrees with what you actually are. I picture to myself, as associated with that name, one who is tall, upright, with clear agate eyes, dark hair, and a somewhat Roman profile.'

'As to my side face,' said Anne Quillet, 'that is just what one never sees.'

'There is another side one never sees.'

'What do you mean?'

'No one perceives his weak side.'

'And that is precisely the side of me I should not care to see. However, I may inform you that you are mistaken in your picture, as far as I am concerned, in supposing me to be tall.'

'I did not say that you were so.'

'Your ideal Anne is. I lack some inches of this ideal. And I do not think that there is a curve of the old Roman in my profile.'

'Would you permit me to rest my hand on your head so as to judge your height?'

'I have no objection,' said the nurse; 'and

I shall then expect to be informed how far I fall short of your ideal.'

She stepped to his bedside, and he put forth his hand; she guided it to her nurse's cap.

'I see,' said he; 'I mean that I discern, you do not quite attain to the height of the Anne I had pictured. Is your hair dark.'

'It is.'

'You have been moving about the room a great deal.'

'If you have heard that, you have been shamming, and not really asleep.'

'Not for a while. I became aware that some one was stirring, and I knew it could not be Polly.'

'She is quieter, I presume, than myself.'

'Yes; she never stirs except when I need her.'

'She must, verily, be an ideal Polly. I am not a perfect nurse. I shall fall short even of this Polly. I have not yet gone through my apprenticeship. I was hurried off here because there was no one else available.'

'Why were you fidgeting so much?'

'To make a clean breast of it, inactivity is a condition so novel to me, that I found

it impossible to sit still any longer. In the dark one cannot read.' She sighed.

'No, one cannot read,' he repeated, and sighed also.

Then she coloured. Inadvertently she had touched on a painful topic. To change the current of his thoughts she said quickly, 'I suppose Polly never talked to you.'

'No, she just answered questions.'

'I am in doubt whether I am doing right in conversing with you now.'

'I think you may do so; and it will be a charity to me. You cannot conceive the tedium of being in the dark, haunted by the terrible fear lest the black curtain should never be lifted—whether the light be excluded for ever.'

'It must be terrible.'

And then, aware how commonplace was the response, she added—

'But this will not be so. You will recover your sight.'

'It is my one hope. As Claudio says—

> "The miserable have no other medicine
> But only hope."

If I do not recover, the joy of existence is extinguished. A full stop is put to all those pursuits that have engaged my mind

for years, and it cuts away at the root all my ambitions.'

'What, to be a successful solicitor?'

'Not that alone, but to become known in the scientific world.'

'I can't understand what can have induced you to play with chemicals. It has nothing to do with engrossing or drawing of leases.'

'It has been my favourite amusement when off my office-work.'

'Amusement!—chemicals!'

'Yes, when I get away from my law business, I have wanted relaxation.'

'Good gracious! why, you might have had that in hockey or billiards.'

'They lead to nothing.'

'One does not want to be always engaged on what leads to something. What a sordid view of life! Your office-work leads to fees. That is an occupation. But making messes with chemicals leads only to a grand blow up. That was an end anyhow, and should content you.'

'Chemical study has been to me the best of amusements, because I was engaged on something that might lead to what would be useful.'

'Useful!' echoed Anne in a tone of contempt.

'Useful!' repeated the patient. 'You would not have taken up with nursing unless you had desired to be useful.'

'There you are wrong. I had no such thought in my head, to be frank.'

'Then, what on earth induced you?'

She did not answer. She would have been ashamed to reveal the motive that had actuated her.

'I cannot see,' she pursued, 'why we should bore ourselves drudging in pursuit of utility.'

'I will tell you,' said Mr. Marmaduke. 'When I was a boy, there was a dip in the land near our house between two hills, and the town resolved to fill it up. So a placard was erected with the inscription "Rubbish shot here." All day long carts passed our doors, laden with the refuse of the town, and tilted their contents into the hollow. An old woman was often there, raking over the heaps, in quest of something serviceable, but I never saw that she found anything. There was nothing but broken bottles, fragments of crockery, empty sardine tins, rags, waste-paper, kitchen offal; never to my knowledge was anything thrown into that gully that was of the smallest value. I came to consider that our days might be like those

carts carrying the contents of our lives, our empty hours, our wasted opportunities, our worthless pursuits, into the void of time past. The idea laid hold of me, even as a child, and I resolved that no day should pass without my having done some profitable work in it, either by improving my own faculties or by doing something of service to my fellows. I would not have an angel poke about, like that old woman, in the heap of the wreckage of my time, and find therein nothing.'

'But now,' said Anne, 'assuming that the worst happen, and that you lose your sight, which I will not believe, then you will unavoidably be condemned to do nothing.'

'Not so; rather than that I will weave baskets, or knit stockings. I will never allow, as the justest appreciation of my life, to have inscribed over my grave, "Rubbish shot here!"'

CHAPTER VI

AN OFFER

'WHAT sort of night has he passed?' asked Mr. Tolcher, entering the sickroom. 'He is feverish and excited this morning.'

'Not a good night. He has been very restless.'

'Did he talk? Did you draw him to speak much?'

Anne hesitated a moment, flushed up and replied, 'Yes, we did have some conversation. For my part I do not see how it could have been avoided. It is intolerably dull for him, as it is for me, to spend hours interminable in the dark.'

'You are here not to pass your opinion, but to receive orders,' retorted the surgeon. 'Please further to remember that you are here not for your amusement, but to fulfil a duty.'

The colour in Anne's cheek deepened.

She was not accustomed to be reprimanded; she resented it as an impertinence.

'The nerves of eye and brain are so intimately allied,' said Mr. Tolcher, 'that what excites one excites also the other. He is somewhat light-headed.'

'He may have a light head,' said Anne sharply, 'but he has got a heavy tongue in it. There was absolutely nothing lively, stimulating in what he did say. It was tedious moralisation. When one goes to church, one expects to have to endure a sermon, but does not calculate on receiving it in a solicitor's lodgings.'

Mr. Tolcher looked at the nurse with surprise, and closed his lips. He was not a good-looking man. Smallpox had spoiled his complexion. He stood for a moment considering whether to speak or not. As he turned away, he said to himself, but audibly enough for her to hear, 'I would to God some one else had been sent.'

Anne Quillet swung herself about, very angry, and went out of the room.

It was at last her time to be off duty. For seven hours she would be free. Before going to bed, she resolved on taking a little walk. When she had donned her bonnet and cloak, she sallied forth. A novel she

must and would have. Out of the twenty-four hours of day and night, she would have to spend seventeen in darkness. She must contrive by some means to obtain light sufficient to enable her to read, but of course she would effect this without detriment to her patient. At the moment the predominant feeling in her heart was boiling indignation.

'These pettifogging country doctors are insufferable in their self-consequence and insolence,' said she. 'To think of it! That fellow saying what he did in the hearing of Polly, that dolt of a maid, with a pudding face, and that of me! of me indeed! I most heartily wish that I had refused to come here.'

The day was one of passing gleams of sun from out of a blue sky, in which rolled clouds, like icebergs drifting in an Arctic ocean. They were laden with snow, and threatened to discharge their burdens over the already white earth.

On leaving the house, Anne looked about her.

Westport lay on the sea; it was one of those places that have leaped suddenly out of the condition of a fishing-village into a fashionable resort for summer visitors.

There were in it, however, a number of residents throughout the year. It was a place where people with moderate incomes settled, who let their houses at high rents during the summer, and retired to still cheaper localities. They formed a society of their own, leading a pleasant, informal life in winter, with their card-parties and reading-clubs. None gave large dinners, and when a ball was determined on, it was a subscription dance, at the assembly rooms. The shops had two prices, one for the residents and for the winter, the other for visitors and for the summer.

Westport possessed the attraction of good sands, downs, and a breakwater, that also served as a promenade.

The town council, desirous of enhancing the attractions of the place, had gone to the expense of a score of wooden seats disposed at suitable intervals on the downs.

In winter, the main excitement was connected with wrecks. There was a new church in progress of construction, as the old parish church lay a mile inland.

When the trees brought forth leaves, the villas put 'Lodgings to let' in their windows, and the owners were buoyed up with anticipations of the terms at which

they would be able to dispose of their eligible residences when the first influx came at Easter, or the great swarm in July.

Several monster hotels had been run up, that dominated the town; but these were without visitors or domestics in the winter, and drew through that season but a torpid existence.

No sooner did the current begin to flow into Westport than the wives and daughters of the fishermen donned black gowns, white caps and aprons, and resolved themselves into chambermaids and waitresses in the hotels, and if ignorant of their duties and incompetent, the visitors could not be angry with those who were so willing and good-humoured.

When Anne Quillet came forth on the snow, she was dazzled by the brilliancy of the sun and the glare of the white surface, her eyes having been accustomed to the darkened room, and some minutes elapsed before she could see distinctly.

Presently she observed a long hill near the villa of Mr. Marmaduke, sheeted with snow, and that several young men were engaged on it. A hedge divided the field from the road, and this hedge was heaped

on the leeward side with a drift, whereas that towards the hill was bare. The young folk were busy with shovels banking up the snow against the exposed side.

Anne felt the cold bite keenly, after having tarried for many hours in a heated apartment.

She did not accordingly remain long standing, but moved in the direction of the station.

On reaching it, she passed through the booking-office, and went upon the platform in quest of the bookstall.

She was instantly saluted by the porter, who ran to her, touched his cap, and with a smile said—

'How do you do, miss? You haven't yet been able to see my little girl?'

'I am sorry,' answered Anne; 'but, really, I have not had leisure. I have been fully engaged, and am but now released.'

'You will go, miss. I live in Tamarisk Row, number thirteen. It will be such a satisfaction to me if you will look at her eyes.'

'But as I have already assured you, I am no judge. You should consult an oculist.'

'O miss! I'd rather you went. But beg pardon, I must be off. There is an old

lady sittin' on her box like an old broody hen, I must attend to her luggage.' And he was gone.

'What a nuisance the man is!' thought Anne. 'I wish he had taken my tip and had not placed me under an obligation to him. This sort of people think that nurses should be at their beck and call.'

Then she went to a stall and selected a couple of novels in sixpenny edition.

That done, and slipping from the porter, who had his eye on her, she left the station and walked back to Mr. Marmaduke's villa.

As she neared the door she was caught up by a young gentleman, who touched his hat and said, 'I think that I had the pleasure of being your fellow-traveller.'

'Yes—you were good enough to help me to a hot-water tin for my feet.'

'May I ask how Mr. Marmaduke is, as I see you at his door? Is there any prospect of his recovering his sight?'

'I cannot tell you. He is still kept in the dark.'

'He is a man we all highly respect. By the way, we are about a little fun here.' He pointed to the workers in the snow. 'We purpose making a tobogganing slide

with a sort of switchback at the end, and a jump over the hedge before we are landed in the snowdrift.'

'I have never tobogganed in my life,' said Anne.

'If you will not think me impertinent,' said the young fellow, 'I would suggest that you should have a run down so soon as we get our sledges. The carpenter is making them as fast as he can.'

'I am sorry—I cannot wait. I have to take my necessary sleep, and that done, go to my work again.'

'When you have a spare hour give us the happiness of swinging you down. I am here with some friends from Oxford for the vacation, and we are bent on amusing ourselves. Will you honour us by an acceptance when you have the chance?'

'I shall be only too happy,' answered Anne, her cheek flushing with pleasure in anticipation.

'After the sickroom it will do you good, make the blood tingle, and every breath you draw a delight. Here, Walters, this lady will have a ride when we have our sledges ready.'

A second young fellow came up and raised his hat.

The two were unmistakably gentlemen, with frank, sunny faces.

'I would dearly love it,' said Anne.

'And if we break any bones, said Walters, 'you will be at hand to set them. It would be worth having a smash-up for that, Johnson.'

'I must really go in,' said Anne.

As she entered the house, Polly met her with, 'O miss! the master has been asking for you.'

'Nonsense,' said Anne. 'He can't have me except at the proper hours. There are rules, and I shall stick to them. I am a nurse, and not a slave.'

CHAPTER VII

ACCEPTED

'IS that the nurse?' asked the patient, as Anne entered, her term of duty having come round.

'Yes.'

'Have you been out?'

'Yes.'

'Is snow still falling?'

'No.'

'A thaw?'

'No.'

'You are uncommunicative.'

'Yes. I have no wish to get again into trouble. If you are to-day worse than you were yesterday, I shall be blamed.'

'Who blames you?'

'That doctor.'

'What—Mr. Tolcher?'

'I have been rebuked sharply, and, as I consider, unjustifiably, on account of my having entered into conversation with you

last night. I will not allow myself to be subjected to such insolence again.'

'Insolence!'

'Insolence,' reiterated Anne. 'He was offensive in his manner.'

'I am very, very sorry.'

'I do not desire to seem discourteous,' said Anne; 'but I must take care of myself. I am not accustomed to be treated in an unbecoming manner, and I must do what I can to avoid a recurrence of this annoyance, and the bringing down on my head of an avalanche of abuse.'

'We did have some talk last night—was it at night? It is now altogether night with me. My mind is confused. I remember something—but it is mixed up with dreams.'

Anne said no more, and he ceased to speak.

Presently Polly tapped. Anne responded, and took from the girl a bottle. The maid whispered something.

Anne nodded and shut the door.

'A composing draught,' she said. 'You are to take it at once—to soothe you after my having stirred you up.' She poured out what had been sent, and put it to the sick man's lips.

That taken, she left him, and went to the

window. There she took a seat on a settee. There was nothing to be seen.

The dark blind was down. Only a streak of light entered at the side between the linen and the window-frame. By means of this line of light, however, she could see the snow-covered landscape, but with one eye only. That, however, was something. Perhaps she would be able to get a glimpse of the tobogganers. She did not see them, but she could hear the merry voices. The glass was obscured by moisture that had settled on it, and ran down, streaking it, and rendering vision through it indistinct.

She remained for some time motionless on the seat, looking with a single eye through the blurred glass.

The patient moved in his bed and sighed; he made no further attempt at conversation.

Then she drew forth one of the novels she had bought and endeavoured to read.

This was no easy matter. The strip of light was insufficient. She could not hold the book to it without obscuring the page. If she sat sideways so that the light might fall on the letterpress, her position on the seat was constrained. Moreover, the type of a sixpenny novel is small and the lines are close together.

She very soon found that her back ached and that her eyes were tired.

As soon as she got through the first chapter she was obliged to relinquish the attempt.

Treading lightly, she went with the book to the fire, and endeavoured to read by its light, but the flicker of the flames playing over the coal-dust that covered or was mixed with the coke distressed her eyes more even than the partial light admitted at the window.

Unwilling to abandon her effort to read, she returned to her former position, and after listening, and hearing that the patient was breathing as in sleep, she ventured to slightly raise the bottom lath of the blind and to prop it up by means of a Japanese tray that she found on the dressing-table.

By placing the book on the window-ledge, she was able to throw a flood of light on the page. But she could read thus only with irksomeness, by kneeling, and the height of the ledge was such that if she knelt on the floor she was kept in a bent position. If she tried to read, sitting on the settee, the ledge was too low.

She looked about in quest of means to rectify this disadvantage, and whilst so doing

touched the blind with her elbow, and the tray fell with a clatter. She looked, startled, towards the bed, to see whether the sound had disturbed the sleeper, but apparently the noise had been slightly noticed. He turned his head, and moaned, but made no remark.

She stole to the bedside, and leaning over the sick man assured herself that the narcotic which had been administered had taken effect. This to her was a great relief.

Returning to the window, she ventured to draw the blind up sufficiently to enable her to read her book with ease, whilst occupying the settee, and resting her back against the window-frame. The light that flowed in could not possibly affect Mr. Marmaduke, who had not only the bandages and compresses on his eyes, but also his head turned from the window.

Anne had not been for long engaged on her book before her attention was withdrawn from the novel by shouts of laughter without.

She rubbed down the pane with her palm, but this only made sight through it more indistinct, as the lines of the moisture were undulating. Then she brought a towel and wiped it.

Now she was able to see.

The young men had got the slide into working order, and had obtained their supply of sledges. They were careering down the slope at lightning speed, and making the leap at the end over the bank where they had piled the snow. With vexatious persistence the vapour reformed on the glass. Again she was constrained to wipe the pane. The air without was cold, and that within heated, so that the moisture of her breath condensed instantaneously on the glass.

'He has not got a cold, and is not likely to catch one,' said Anne to herself. 'He is muffled up in bed—and the room is stuffy. It will do him good to have a change of air. No wonder that he becomes feverish and wanders in such an atmosphere as this.'

Then she put her hand to the hasp, noiselessly turned it back, and gently raised the sash.

The air came in fresh. It was a pleasure to inhale it.

Anne looked round at the bed. The sleeper lay in the same position, with averted face, and his breathing came evenly.

She sat well in the window-frame, looking forth, and was able from her position to

command the whole of the slope, and to see all the fun.

With a slash down came a sleigh, and seated on it was the young Oxonian undergraduate who had made her acquaintance in the train, and had accosted her in the street.

As soon as he had landed in the drift at the bottom, he sprang up, and turning in the direction of the house caught sight of the nurse. His hat was off in a moment, and approaching the house, he called, 'May we have the pleasure now?'

Anne turned her head again, and looked at the bed.

What possible harm could ensue were she to desert her post for three minutes? The patient lay like a log in dead slumber induced by opiates.

She leaned forth, and answered, 'One ride, one only. I will be down in a moment.'

Then she hastily drew down the sash, buckled it, and stole past the foot of the bed.

No movement there. No token of restlessness. No symptom of awakening.

Nevertheless she lingered before leaving the room with her finger to her lip. Then she noticed that one arm had been withdrawn from under the bedclothes and the

hand was depending at the side. She gently raised it, and lifting the sheet and blankets, replaced the arm and covered it up.

Mr. Marmaduke gave no token of waking, and this satisfied her that she could absent herself without risk for a few minutes.

She slipped from the room, and descending the stairs, lightly assumed her bonnet and snow-shoes, and left the house.

She was eagerly welcomed by the young men, who conducted her to the summit of the incline.

Johnson, her former acquaintance, planted himself on the sleigh in front, to guide it, and insisted on her taking the place behind. In an instant she was whirling down the slope, her veil flying behind her.

The sun had burst forth. The snow blazed in her eyes. The cold air rushed over her face and brought the blood into her cheeks.

She caught her breath as the jump was reached, but in a moment the sleigh with its freight had bounded over it, and she was lodged in safety in the soft snow beyond.

She sprang to her feet.

'You must have another,' said Johnson.

'With me this time,' pleaded Walters.

'No indeed! I must go back.'

'Nonsense! It will not take five minutes, and one ride gives zest for the next.'

'I claim this one,' said Walters.

'Well — one more only — if you will promise not to urge me for a third.'

And she had a second ride.

As she alighted at the bottom she looked up at the window, and with a shock saw a hand draw down the blind.

'Good heavens!' she gasped, 'I shut the window, but forgot to darken it.'

CHAPTER VIII

A TRUST BETRAYED

WITH a fluttering heart Anne hastened upstairs. It was humiliating to her to have a servant discover that she had quitted her post, and had omitted the precaution of drawing down the blind. How to justify her conduct she did not consider. It was inconsistent with her self-respect to stoop to an explanation before a domestic drudge. But on opening the door of the sickroom she saw that the surgeon was there as well as Mary.

He turned on her his pasty face, and it was stern. At once he came towards her, and grasping her wrist, drew her forth upon the landing.

'Let go my arm, please,' said Anne; 'you hurt me.'

'Never shall you enter that room again,' said he.

'I am come to say that I do not purpose

remaining,' was Anne's retort. 'I am about to return home.'

'As you will, so long as we are rid of you. I shall speak with you presently.'

Then he released her wrist, turned, and shut the bedroom door in her face.

Anne was mortified and incensed.

She was glad to be relieved of her task. She would go back to the institution, cast aside her uniform, and return to her family. It was not fitting that a lady by birth and education should be subjected to such affronts.

However, she lingered on the landing, dubious in mind what to do. She was unaware at what hour the next train left, and she would require a cab to convey her to the station.

Polly came forth.

'O miss! how could you?' she said. 'The master was sitting up, and had the bandages off his face, and was staring with his poor eyes at the dazzling snow—the blind being up.'

'Why did he do that? He is old enough to know better. He has cut his wise teeth, I presume.'

'O miss! he was dreaming and light-headed, and he did not know what he was

about. That is just what Dr. Tolcher has been fearing all along, and why he wanted him to be closely watched.'

'I must have a cab fetched for me; I am leaving. I cannot remain longer in a house visited by Mr. Tolcher.'

'Law, miss! I am sorry—I can't run for one now. I have got to bring some hot water. You must excuse me,' and the girl hurried in the direction of the kitchen.

Anne withdrew to her room.

Her box required but little packing. Few articles had been taken from it. She put her belongings together, locked and strapped the box, descended the stairs, opened the front door and went forth in quest of a conveyance.

She had not taken many steps before she encountered her Oxford acquaintance. He went up to her at once, with a smile on his bright face.

'Come for another ride?' he asked.

'Alas, no! I am on my way to order a fly—I am returning home.'

'Leaving already. Is Mr. Marmaduke well again?'

'I am afraid worse; and a more experienced nurse than myself is required. I am not as yet qualified.'

'I am so sorry. But you shall certainly not go for a conveyance. I will run for that —and gladly. At what time is the man to come round?'

'As soon as possible.'

The young man good-naturedly ran off in the direction of the station. Anne re-entered the house, and as she did so, saw the surgeon descending the staircase.

In order to escape an interview which must prove vexatious, she stepped aside into the dining-room, trusting that he would take his hat and stick and depart straightway, without further concerning himself about her. But in this she was mistaken. He followed her into the room, and shut the door behind him.

'I have a word for you,' said he. 'It is customary when a nurse leaves that a paper should be signed by the medical attendant, or by some connection of the patient, testifying to her efficiency and good conduct. I shall not sign for you.'

'There is no need for you to do so,' retorted Anne; 'I am going to my home.'

'It is well that you should quit a profession for which you are morally un-

qualified. A nurse is one who forgets herself in solicitude for the patient. On her reposes an obligation that she has accepted as a duty to be conscientiously discharged.'

Anne made no observation. She was too angry to speak.

'We shall have to do without your services because we have learned that we cannot rely on you! Mary will attend to her master. She may not be clever, or educated, but she is faithful and unselfish, qualities in which we have found you to be deficient. Some day Polly will make the happiness of a man in humble life, and will do her duty in that state of life to which it shall please God to call her, as she does in this—of menial service. Heaven help the man who chooses you.'

'Mr. Tolcher,' said Anne, firing up, her cheek glowing, and her eyes flashing, 'I am a lady, and will not submit to be insulted. You have taken advantage of me here, where there is no gentleman to protect me. I cannot force my way past you, and you use your advantage basely.'

'I am telling you what you must hear,' said the surgeon quietly. 'You undertook a responsibility of the gravest character.

A man's whole after-life and prospects in his profession depended on a conscientious discharge of the duties which you had undertaken. You have betrayed a solemn trust. Why did you leave Mr. Marmaduke?'

Anne did not answer.

'Why?—To amuse yourself, because you set your own selfish pleasure before the welfare of a man who was placed under your care.'

'I am sure,' said Anne, tossing her chin defiantly, 'that you are much beholden to me. If you make a botch of the case, you will be able to shrug your shoulders, and saddle me—poor me, with all the blame.'

'You judge others by your own spirit, which would prompt you, when you have done wrong, to take refuge in evasions and in shifting responsibilities.'

His plain, pock-marked face was pale with anger.

'Nurse, I will not call you,' he proceeded; 'unworthy as you are of so sacred a designation. Take this thought away with you, and if not case-hardened by self-righteousness and self-conceit, let it eat into your heart like a canker. This poor fellow I am

attending will curse you to his dying day, as the one who has cast a blight upon his life, by depriving him of the most blessed gift of God—"Light."'

'There is my cab!—I dare you to detain me.'

'Go—I have no wish for more of you. May you carry away my words, and may they profit you.'

He stood aside and allowed her to pass. He said no word of farewell, and she turned her head aside and went by him with it held erect and defiant.

In the passage she gave orders for her box to be brought down, and she bustled about with affected alacrity.

'Here,' said Anne loftily to the girl, 'here is something for your pains.'

She offered the half-crown that had been refused by the porter.

'No, thank you,' answered Polly; 'nothing from you, miss.'

Anne bit her lip. She was humiliated by the girl's refusal. She knew why her offering was rejected, and the reason was not flattering. She stepped into the fly. The servant-girl assisted the driver with the luggage. Then the man mounted to the box.

At that moment the surgeon reappeared, and ran to the cab door.

'Here! Take all your rubbish with you!' he said, and threw her sixpenny novels in at the window upon her lap.

CHAPTER IX

A TRAGEDY

A TRAIN was standing in the station. Anne Quillet hastily provided herself with a ticket, eager to leave Westport at the first opportunity, and ran along the platform for a porter to label her box.

She found her acquaintance, Thomas, and hastily told him what she desired.

'Where are you going?' he asked.

Being somewhat flurried and out of breath, instead of replying in words, she showed him the ticket.

'Bless you, miss! this is the down-train. Yours won't be in for 'arf an hour. 'Tother side of the station.' Then after giving a direction to another passenger—I'll attend to you, miss, in a moment. There's plenty of time. You haven't yet been to see my little girl, I think.'

'I am very sorry, but I have not had the chance.'

'But you are not going away for good?'

'Yes, I am.'

'That is unfortunate. I did reckon on your being able to do something for her eyes. Now then!—Get off there, if you please!'

This was shouted to a sailor who dashed across the platform towards the train that was already in motion, and tried to swing himself into a carriage.

'Stand back! get off!' roared the station-master. Thomas ran to the man, who, unable to turn the handle of the door of a third-class carriage, was making an attempt to scramble in at the window.

'Now then, there!' called the guard, who was on the step of the compartment of the carriage he was about to enter.

'Stay, you fellow! Get off!' vociferated an officious passenger on the platform, who had just left the train, and he brandished his umbrella menacingly.

Thomas caught hold of the sailor, but had to run along the platform, dragging at the fellow, as the pace of the train was accelerated. The man showed no intention of relaxing his hold. He would not be dislodged, and rather than lose his train, strove to release himself by kicking out behind. As he did this, with his boot he caught

the porter on the lower jaw, and Thomas instantaneously let go.

Already the train was gliding rapidly forward. The whole transaction was over in an instant. Obliged to loose his grasp when struck by the sailor's boot, Thomas had slipped, then fallen, carried forward by the movement of the train, and had gone down between the carriage and the platform.

In another moment the train had passed out of the station.

Then ensued confusion, shouts, and exclamations, and a rush of officials along the platform. Some of those congregated in the station ran to the verge and recoiled with ghastly faces. A porter sped forward, waving a flag, to signal the train to put back.

A woman went into hysterics. The youth with the basket of papers and periodicals that he vended slung the encumbrance behind his back, and stretched his neck over the rails to see what had occurred.

The barmaids of the refreshment-room came forth in a flutter to inquire what was the cause of the commotion. The gentleman with the umbrella was gesticulating and propounding opinions, and giving advice on all sides. Only a boy engaged on a sausage-

roll was unconcerned, or was too much engrossed in ramming nutriment into his mouth to be able to devote attention to other matters.

Then the station-master sped down the platform, with arms extended, vociferating, 'All off! all outside, please! clear the platform of every one but the porters.'

He swept before him the motley assemblage of those who had come to see friends off; those who had descended from the down train; those who were intending to proceed in the contrary direction, and those who had come with no particular object, but to watch the embarkation and disembarkation of passengers.

'Along with you there!' he addressed the boy of the book-stall. 'Get back with the rest!'

As Anne was being hustled before him, he singled her out and said, 'You stay. You are a nurse, and may be of use. All the rest clear away.'

The people retreated before him. 'Now then! now then!'—to a porter, 'Lock all the doors. Bring a tarpaulin sheet. Sharp is the word! Spread it on the down-platform.'

He went to the spot where the accident had occurred, returned quickly, and noticing

the newsboy hiding behind the book-stall, went to him, caught him by the shoulder, and said roughly, 'You be off!—Cut away and fetch the doctor; not that he's any good, I fear—yet he must be summoned. Now, no dawdling; you hook it.'

Then he returned to direct the officials. 'Be quick, now! The up-train will he here shortly, and we must have everything cleared away before that. Come! come! Get the poor fellow from the rails, and put him on the oilcloth.'

Two porters swung themselves down upon the railway.

Anne looked on with a dazed head, standing back against the wall—a background of advertisements of soaps, cocoas, hams, and liver-pills.

Then she saw a heap being lifted—a mass of mangled humanity, and placed on the black tarpaulin sheet, the station-master standing and giving directions, but with a mottled face.

'Good heavens!' he said, 'the poor chap has been cut to pieces. Gather all up. Be quick, before the train comes in. The passengers must see nothing of it. Here, Jones, run on to the down-train that has been stopped! Say that an accident has

occurred—a man killed. Detain it only till you have swabbed down the wheels, and then let it proceed. Come back with a pail and mop. We shall require them here.'

One of the porters turned faint and sick.

'Simpson,' said the station-master, 'for God's sake don't be a fool! Run to the refreshment-bar and have a nip of brandy. We want all hands to exert themselves to put everything to rights before the up-train comes in. Bless my soul! she 'll be here in two minutes. Here, Simpson! go on to the signal-box, and say that she must not come in till we have all clear. The run will set you right again—and the brandy.'

Anne shivered. The station spun round with her.

Through the glass windows of the waiting-rooms could be seen the people, increasing in number, some flattening their noses against the panes, till they looked like dabs of putty. Some, in their impatience to see what was to be seen, attempted to force the doors. Others, intending travellers by the up-train, were remonstrating and protesting that the officials had no right to exclude them, and that they would miss the train. Some of the masons engaged on a new house being erected near at hand had

clambered over the railings, outside the station, and were coming towards the platform.

The station-master shouted and swore at these latter, and they did not venture nearer than where the footway descended to the level of the rails to facilitate a crossing from one side to the other.

A confused noise of tongues penetrated to where Anne stood. It proceeded from those outside. The tidings that an accident had taken place had begun to spread.

'Has the doctor arrived?' asked the station-master.

'No, sir, not yet.'

'It matters nothing, save for the form of the thing,' said the station-master.

Then round the corner of the building came a young man—one of those who had been engaged in tobogganing. He persevered in defiance of the commands to go back, and said, 'I am a medical student. Can I be of assistance?'

'No one can do anything for him,' replied the station-master; 'but please go with that'—he indicated the porters who were engaged with the truck-cloth. 'I suppose Mr. Tolcher will be here shortly.'

Then to the porters: 'Now, then! Mind

there! turn the flaps of the cloth over, that nothing may be seen, and bring it into the third-class waiting-room after me. I will clear the road.'

He ran forward, unlocked the door, and swept the people out of the room, all but one inquisitive woman, who dived under his arm and came out on the platform, where she got in the way of the men who were carrying the load enveloped in the tarpaulin sheet.

The outer door to the waiting-room having been locked, the station-master signed to the men to bring in their burden and lay it on the table.

Then he went forth on the platform again, found the woman who had got in surreptitiously, and ejected her.

'Where is Jones? is he back? Bid him wash down the rails and remove every trace.'

Then careering along the platform he espied Anne.

'Ah!' said he, approaching her; 'the nurse, to be sure. All right, just what I wanted. Poor fellow, he had a daughter, a blind girl, at No. 13 Tamarisk Row. I will let you through—you must go as fast as you can to his house, and break

the news to the child. She must not learn it without being prepared. Go at once.'

'I—I—,' stammered Anne; 'I am not a Sister of Mercy. I want to be off by the up-train.'

The station-master looked steadily into her eyes.

There was an expression in his face that quailed her.

Then he turned his back, signed to a rough, red-faced navvy, at the extremity of the station—'Here, Bill Bucket,' said he; 'go down to that poor fellow's house, and break the news gently to the child. There is a woman here who won't do it.'

CHAPTER X

GOLDEN TEARS

ANNE was alone in a lady's compartment of a first-class carriage, hurrying from detested Westport.

For perhaps the first time in her life, she had no desire for society—society, that is—as Nathaniel says in *Love's Labour's Lost*—'the happiness of life.' She was glad to have no fellow-passengers with her. It was due to her desire to be alone that she had indulged in a first-class ticket. Her nerves were thrilling; her heart was sick. She was unable to collect her thoughts.

As the sun had set, the white landscape became a grey tract. The darkness of night gathered fast, and after an hour she became more composed.

The horror of what she had witnessed, which had induced a species of stupor, subsided, and her mind rested on the part

A FIRST LESSON HAD BEEN LEARNED BY HER, BUT AT WHAT A COST TO ANOTHER

she had taken, or rather had omitted to take, in the recent tragedy.

It had been through no lack of good feeling that she had declined to act as requested by the station-master.

Her head had been reeling, she had been unable to gather her thoughts and judge what was fitting for her to do. Her reply had been prompted by the first thoughts that shot up in her brain—the thought that a very uncongenial task had been imposed upon her—to visit the poor girl, and break to her the news that her father had been killed in a railway accident —the thought, in the next place, that to do this would delay her return home, by causing her to miss her train.

There could be no doubt that the station-master had been displeased at her refusal, and had attributed it to heartless selfishness.

No one relishes being thought ill of, even by a station-master, and Anne travelled on her way oppressed with the conviction that she had been harshly judged and condemned unjustly.

'Yet what does it signify?' said she to herself. 'I shall never be in Westport again, and the man is not likely to see

me again. His opinion, good or bad, is of no importance.' But this consideration did not give her rest.

Then there was that matter of the half-crown which poor Thomas had declined to receive, taking in exchange a promise that she would visit his daughter. She had not fulfilled her promise. She had not seized the first occasion that had presented itself of discharging the debt, and now she was weighed under an obligation contracted to a dead man, which it was not possible for her to fulfil.

'Well,' said Anne to herself, 'I will send the girl a sovereign.'

But even this thought did not satisfy her. She felt that she had made a mistake. Opportunities must be seized as they occur, or they slip away irretrievably.

The lamp in the carriage was alight. Instead of seeing the landscape through the window-panes, Anne saw only the reflection of herself in the glass, and that blurred by the moisture that condensed.

'How shall I send the sovereign to the girl?' asked she. Should she forward it through the station-master, and by this means let him know that she was not as callous as he had supposed; or should she

send it direct to the girl herself? If the latter, how should she address the letter? She could hardly put Miss Thomasine Thomas as a direction to a mere porter's daughter, and the name without the title would look bald, and might give offence.

This was a petty matter; but it is petty matters that mainly make up woman's calculations. The feminine mind tithes mint and anise and cummin, when passing over the weighty matters of the law.

The thought would not keep down that a sovereign could not make adequate amends for her neglect. The station-master, on her refusal to break the tidings to the child, had committed the charge to a coarse-looking, red-faced navvy. Was there a gentler heart, a more pitiful spirit under that rude exterior, than beneath her own refined and elegant self?

Then she began to wonder about the future of Thomasine.

That the girl had no mother, she was aware. The father had confided to her that his wife was dead.

What would become of the orphan?

There were funds at the disposal of the Amalgamated Railway Servants' Society, doubtless, that would be drawn upon.

There was, of course, an orphanage into which she could be put. The railway company would have to pay damages. Thomas himself, or the child's mother, would have relatives that would concern themselves about her welfare. But the loss of a beloved father, to a child deprived of her eyesight, must make that child's bereavement more than ordinarily distressing.

Then, from thinking on Thomasine Thomas, Anne's mind slid to the consideration of Mr. Marmaduke's blindness.

Had the premature admission of a blaze of daylight on his eyes actually caused the disastrous result represented by that vulgar doctor? The man had probably exaggerated the consequences so as to alarm and humiliate her. It could not be, and yet—it might be—and, if so, upon her lay the responsibility for his devastated career.

He could no longer pursue his avocation as a lawyer, no further prosecute his darling studies. A man with an active mind would no more be able to read.

What a tedious, insupportable time it had seemed to her to spend seventeen hours out of twenty-four in a darkened room! and what to him would be an existence so drawn

out!—a life, say, of fifty years in permanent, unrelieved blackness of darkness! Never again to see a flower, the blue sea twinkling, the yellow sands, a girl's face, a lovely bit of mountain scenery! What a privation; and due to her—due to a bit of heedlessness—to her having taken two sledge rides down a slope of snow.

'He will curse you all his days,' Mr. Tolcher had said.

That would be a thought to trouble her throughout her life. Bah! curses do no harm. They are mere words.

That might be so; but she could not discharge from her mind the thought that there would be a man whose happiness, whose power for usefulness, had been destroyed by her, through levity, through pleasure-seeking, during five minutes.

What were his means? Not ample. Of that she had been assured.

Probably he depended on his profession. Then he would be cast as a burden on his family—on Mrs. Basileg. What would that hateful woman say of her? How she would proclaim among all her relatives and acquaintances that her brother had been blinded through the thoughtlessness of a nurse! How she would plume herself on

her prevision, in having objected to the nurse whom the surgeon had chosen to retain!

'Thank goodness!' said Anne, 'Mrs. Basileg belongs to a very different circle of acquaintances, and of society, from that in which I move, so that the mutterings of her discontent will never reach me.'

Anne could not, however, keep her mind on this theme.

How her conduct would be discussed in Westport by every one, rich and poor alike, by high and by low, at every dinner-table, in every drawing-room, in every pot-house! Her evil report would come to the ears of those gallant young fellows who had given her the ride. That was a galling consideration.

Moreover, Mr. Tolcher was certain to write to the matron of the Nursing Institution, whence Anne had been sent, to report on her conduct. It would be discussed by all the nurses and probationers, and emphatic would be the condemnation pronounced upon her.

And she would be unable to defend herself.

But on what plea could she excuse her conduct, even if given the opportunity?

Grope as she might for an excuse, she could find no justification whatever. That she had been tired of her task, and desired a slide—that was nothing. Anne moved uneasily on her seat. She changed her place in the carriage for the corner opposite to the direction taken by the engine.

She could find no rest. She refolded her rug. She looked at one of her novels, but the light was insufficient to enable her to read.

Although the night was cold, she was hot, heated by an internal fire that tinged her brow and cheeks, and brought finally tears into her eyes—tears that ran down her face.

For the first time in her life she was aware, and was forced to admit, that she had not acted in the best possible manner, that there was something in herself not commendable.

The tears that flowed were golden tears. They were not tears of humbled pride, nor of wounded vanity, but tears of self-reproach.

A first lesson had been learned by her, but at what a cost to another!

CHAPTER XI

A THREAT

'WELL! Anne—home again!' exclaimed Vic and Flossie Quillet, springing to their feet, and rushing to embrace their sister as she entered the room.

The two younger Misses Quillet had been seated by the fire; Vic in an armchair, with a novel on the floor at her side, that had fallen from her lap, and upon which a poodle was engaged, biting into the pages and tearing them.

Flossie was on a hassock with her elbow on a chair, which she upset as she leaped to meet her sister Anne.

'Oh, how awfully jolly that you are back!' she exclaimed. 'We have been bored to death—nothing to amuse us; and now you must tell us all the high jinks you have had at the hospital, and about the medical students. They are a rum lot, are they not?'

'Yes,' said Anne; 'here I am, glad

to be home, notwithstanding the chronic servant trouble. How are you off in that particular?'

'Oh! I don't know,' answered Vic; 'the show runs itself somehow. We have a cook who, I believe, drinks, and has to be carried to bed every third night.'

'And a housemaid who, I vow, has taken some of my best lace,' added Florence.

'But one might forgive the tippling,' said Vic, 'so long as she did not exhibit intoxication manifestly before our eyes upstairs; but she doesn't cook, she spoils whatever she touches.'

'What a nuisance!' sighed Anne. 'I did hope that you would have brought matters domestic into some sort of order. I could not stand the bother and bolted, thinking to have all found in the Institution for Nurses—but we had to do everything there for ourselves.'

'What—cook?'

'No—but we were set to make the beds and to scrub the floor.'

'Scrub the floor! Do menial work!' exclaimed Flossie. 'I would have died before submitting to that.'

'I had to do it whether I liked or not. If I had not been afraid of ridicule here, I

would have come back long ago. Girls! I have had a miserable time of it, so that to come home even to our huggamugging household is better. At home, at all events, one can do nothing, whereas in our Institution one is forced to make oneself useful.'

'Awful!' gasped Flossie. 'Fancy being forced to do anything.'

'But you have not told us about the medical students. Had you great fun with them?'

'No—they were kept at a distance. We hardly spoke to them.'

'Were there any handsome doctors?'

'They were utterly matter-of-fact, eminently prosaic and professional, and middle-aged to a man.'

'Then you had no fun?'

'None whatever.'

'What a sell! And the place you were at last,' said Victoria, 'where you were put in a dark room like an undeveloped photograph?'

'It has developed the fact that I am unfitted to be a nurse.'

'Well, tell something to make us laugh—something droll about the snuffy old lawyer who had blinded himself. There, Fido! now you have torn the book—it came from

"HAD YOU GREAT FUN WITH THE MEDICAL STUDENTS?"

the lending library. You wicked dog! They won't take it back, and I shall have to replace it. Come, Anne, have you not some good stories to tell us? Heard any comical things lately? Met any oddities? I am sure that blinded man afforded food for mirth.'

'No,' said Anne, 'I have nothing enlivening to relate'; her face was grave, and her mouth twitched nervously.

'Then we have something to tell you. There is to be a ball at Barley Place on Thursday, and we are all going. So you will get at once into the swim again, after long sticking in the mud.'

'I shall be glad,' observed Anne; 'I am out of spirits, with one thing or another; I am horribly low.'

'I should be that,' exclaimed Flossie. 'Fancy being shut up in the dark with a blind man—a lawyer, too—for ever so many hours, day and night. A lawyer, of all things in the world. It must have been awful.'

'It was bad,' sighed Anne.

'Anne!' exclaimed Vic, 'Flossie has been carrying on with young Calgarry. The two walk home together from the hockey-ground every day. I have to keep my distance

with Cissie May, as I do not relish the office of gooseberry-picker.'

'Nonsense, Vic!' said the youngest. 'He is polite, and our roads home lie in the same direction, and he accompanies us.'

'Oh yes,' laughed the elder; 'I am out of the game altogether. Besides, there are two ways to his house, one direct as a bow-string, the other curved as the bow itself. He does not take the former, but that which enables him to play the cavalier to you.'

'And pray,' retorted Florence, 'who is it at hockey who sets her cap at Captain Gregory? Really, Anne, Vic should not be so effusive, and wear her heart on her sleeve. It is not seemly to show such admiration for a man.'

For the first time something in her sisters' manner and conversation jarred on Anne. A fibre in her soul that had hitherto been insensible had been touched and quivered.

The Honourable Colonel Quillet, the father of the three girls, had been left a widower early, and the sisters had been without a mother to direct and to control them. They had brought themselves up without a purpose in life other than that of getting all the amusement and pleasure out of it that was possible. They possessed

no principle other than that of doing what Society allowed, and avoiding what Society forbade.

They were without vice, they were good-natured, careless girls, craving after excitement, restless in its pursuit, gravitating through thoughtlessness into a fast set, and altogether impatient of discipline.

Anne was the eldest. She and Vic were pretty, eminently so. Florence suspected that she was not as good-looking as her elder sisters, and her thoughts were concerned mainly in trying to make herself attractive by such little arts as women know so well how to use, whereby to disguise defects, and enhance those natural charms of which none, when young, are wholly deficient.

'Is Anne here?' asked the Colonel, entering the room.

His eldest daughter rose to meet and embrace him.

'Yes, papa, back as a bad penny. I shall never make a nurse, and that has been proved to my own conviction.'

'I never supposed you would,' said the Colonel, a spare, elderly man, with a fine profile, a grey moustache and hair, and a weak mouth and lower jaw.

'I really do not know for what you are calculated,' said he.

'That is not a civil speech, papa.'

'My dear, you have, so far as I am aware, not proved your aptitude for anything useful. I want to know, now that you are back, whether you purpose remaining at home, or whether you intend to fly off and daub and spoil canvases as an art student.'

'Oh no, papa.'

'There was no saying. A quest after a new sensation would call you away at any time. I desire to know now who is to undertake the management of the house? Everything is going to sixes and sevens, and my purse will not stand it. The coals I am convinced are being stolen. The bills come in unchecked. The servants do as they like, and, in a word, the condition of affairs has become intolerable. Moreover, the parlour-maid last night smashed a tray full of my best cut glass decanters and wines.'

'Papa,' said Victoria, 'why not engage a housekeeper?'

'She would cost me little short of a hundred a year, and require a sitting-room as well as bedroom to herself. The house is not large enough for that, nor is my

purse deep enough. If you girls cannot between you keep the establishment going in as orderly and respectable manner as is due to our place, I—I—I—I shall marry again.' And so saying he slipped out of the room.

The sisters looked at each other and laughed.

'He doesn't mean it,' said Vic.

'That was a dummy shell thrown in our midst,' observed Flossie composedly.

'I am not so certain of that,' remarked Anne gravely. 'If he had not meant it, he would have remained in the room to stand our battery of chaff. But, girls, he threw his petard, and, as you say, ran away.'

CHAPTER XII

SITTING OUT

THERE could be little doubt entertained by those present at Mrs. Maltravers' ball at Barley Place, even by the women, that Anne Quillet was the prettiest girl there. Her figure was neat and graceful. She was not one of those elongated damsels—Maypoles, Hermia called them, who are produced so largely at the present day, to look down on men. Her features were not regular; she had lustrous eyes, exquisite colouring, and her glossy hair rippled over her brows and curled about her temples. It was gathered up behind and heaped on her head so as to expose that supreme beauty in a woman—a graceful nape. Her sisters recognised how striking she was; Flossie with a little pang, not of jealousy—she loved Anne too well for that—but of regret for herself; and Vic also had a twinge, as she saw Anne draw

away from herself that same Captain Gregory about whom Flossie had twitted her.

The only person who was unconscious of this was Anne herself, and this was due to no lack of perception of her own perfections generally, but to preoccupation.

We are only at ease at such time as we are unconscious that we possess limbs and organs. A microscopic thorn in the finger, an almost invisible grit in the eye, a bit of undigested cheese of the size of a bean in the stomach, are sufficient to disturb the even tenor of our happiness. And it is the same in the moral being. The smallest jar in the conscience, the presence in the memory of some error committed, some wrong done, troubles the outlook in the present. There is a sensitive point deep hidden within which a word may touch and cause us to wince.

Anne was not in pain because she had done a wrong to one person, and had neglected to do a kindness to another, but she could not shake off the consciousness that something had gone wrong. She did not care to think of what had happened, but the vessel of her memory had received a crack and would not sound a pleasant note.

A slight disturbance in the physical

organism manifests itself by a quickened pulsation and a heightened colour, and it is the same where there is trouble in the soul—that also betrays itself externally. It was so now with Anne, although she resolutely trod down the thought of what she had done amiss, and what good she had omitted doing, yet she could no more rid herself of it, than one can rid oneself of a wound by covering it with a plaster. And now Anne's eye was brighter and her colour higher than usual, sure indications of internal fever.

Flossie was dancing with Mr. Calgarry, and when not dancing, drawing him into dark corners to sit out with him a waltz or set of lancers.

Vic had many partners; she had indeed been round with Captain Gregory, but he had left her to seek the society of Anne.

Anne was in great request. She wore a pretty light green silk with lace over it, and a bunch of lilies of the valley in her bosom, another in her hair fastened by an emerald brooch. The tint suited her complexion; the tone of green was not too deep for the flush on her cheek.

Anne had been dancing with Captain

Gregory, a man for whom she entertained a sincere regard, a gentleman of family and means, upright and manly, great at all games. He was usually good, though not brilliant, company. He was charged with local gossip, possessed a fund of tittle-tattle, could retail the newest jokes, and possessed a little weak humour of his own. But this evening he appeared to be out of sorts, and as Anne was not in the brightest humour, they maintained but a laboured conversation together.

'You have the taste of a French or American woman, Miss Quillet,' said her partner. 'You know exactly what style of dress will suit you. And you are bold enough to assume green, although it is an unlucky colour.'

'Is it unlucky? I was unaware of that.'

'On the stage. No actor or actress will wear it without a protest, so strong is the prejudice that it draws ill luck after it.'

'But this is not the stage.'

'*Absit omen.* May ill luck never befall you.'

'Ill luck has—' began Anne, and checked herself; but a rush of blood proclaimed that her words had disclosed a sore. She did not

finish the sentence. She had intended to say that her ill luck was past.

Captain Gregory did not notice her deepened tint. He went on—

'An English girl rarely knows how to dress. Look round this ball-room and convince yourself that it is so. Seven out of ten have chosen unbecomingly. A French or American lady studies her peculiar style, and accommodates her dress to that. An English woman adopts the prevailing fashion in hat, colour, and the wearing of the hair which is the rage for the season. An English woman is the slave of fashion, and has not the courage or the taste to consider herself above the fashion. It is with costume and colour as with words. English young ladies take up expressions that have the run for the day—adjectives such as awful, or weird — and employ them haphazard, whether suitable, expressive, or not; so with their hats, the colour of their ribbons, and their coiffure.'

'I believe that you are right,' answered Anne. 'This winter the rage in colour is for London smoke, and muddy complexions become the muddier by contrast with that.'

'A girl without taste,' said Captain

Gregory, 'should place herself unreservedly in the hands of an experienced dressmaker.'

'But no girl will admit that she is without taste.'

'The eye needs education every whit as much as the ear. One of my sisters invariably sang flat. We told her of it; and she had the good sense to place herself under instruction, and not to sing in public till she had rectified her ear. So with the eye that that has not the faculty of distinguishing beauty in colour or form, it can be trained.'

'But if the eye be blind?'

Captain Gregory halted. The dance was at an end.

'Shall we go into the conservatory?' he inquired of his partner; 'it is unpleasantly warm in here.'

'Thank you. I shall not dance the next waltz,' said Anne, 'for I do not feel quite myself. I had a railway journey the other day—night, I mean, and it has left me somewhat unstrung.'

'And I,' said the captain, 'I am not myself to-night. I have had some very distressing news—and what you have just said has brought it back with a rush upon me.'

'What did I say?'

'Come into the conservatory and I will tell you,' said the captain; 'I feel that an excuse is due for my dulness as a partner.'

He drew her from the ball-room.

The conservatory was lighted with coloured lamps. It was a winter-garden on the north side of the house, with the windows of the ball-room, library, and dining-room opening into it. At one extremity a fountain pattered over ferns and moss; the side opposed to the house was banked up with azalias, primulas, and hyacinths. Garden seats were placed in alcoves among camelias.

Some couples were seated already in the conservatory.

'Here,' said Captain Gregory, 'here is a bench vacant by the fountain, and the light is not strong and distracting.'

Anne seated herself, and laid her fan on her lap. It was small, of ivory, with a gauze web drawn over it set with spangles. She held it lightly and open in one gloved hand, and leaned back into the shade. The trickle of water was pleasant to the ear. Occasionally a few drops caught the light from the nearest pendent lamp, and flashed like the spangles on Ann's fan when set in motion.

'What has been troubling you?' she asked. 'And what can I have said to wake the sleeping trouble in your mind?'

Before her companion answered, she heard a laugh from the farther end of the conservatory—a boisterous laugh, and she knew that it proceeded from Flossie, who was noisy in her mirth. Anne winced.

This annoyed her.

'What you said!' repeated the captain; 'it was about eyes being blinded?'

Suddenly a ripple of twinkles ran down Anne's fan. Her fingers had contracted nervously upon it.

'Eyes,' she repeated in a subdued tone.

'Yes, I have heard to-day some tidings that deeply affect me, tidings of a very dear old friend of mine at a place called Westport.'

Anne shut her fan, and held it closed with both hands.

'A friend whom I value most highly has met with a sad accident and injured his eyes. However, his sight was not despaired of. Then a nurse was sent for from, I believe, one of the hospitals, and she was intrusted with the charge of him. Well! the wretched creature was unworthy of the

confidence reposed in her. She neglected him to follow her own pleasure, to go tobogganing, I am told, when she was supposed to be watching at his bedside. He was left alone whilst she was amusing herself. He plucked off his bandages in a fit of delirium, and was found staring at the snow that was blazing in the sunlight. That means,—he is blinded for life. The woman —can you conceive such a selfish pig! she should have been hooted out of Westport as a disgrace to womanhood.'

Anne's head had sunk on her bosom. In raising a hand to deprecate what he said, her fan had opened again, and now it quivered and flashed on her lap.

'A selfish pig,' she repeated.

'Well—it is a rough expression. But does she deserve a better—a woman who could so forget her duties and disregard her responsibilities?' He looked round, but was unable to see the face of Anne.

'And to think that one of the sex should act thus! It fills one with disgust. Thank God, that there is not one in a thousand who would have so forgotten herself, and have done what that creature did.'

'Do you know her name?' Anne asked in a muffled voice.

'No, I do not want to be told it.'

Then said Anne slowly, with her eyes fixed on the ground, 'You are quite right. No word was too strong. She was a selfish pig, and a dishonour to womanhood.'

CHAPTER XIII

BAD FORM

ANNE returned home without her sisters. She complained of not feeling well—she was out of harmony with the merriment that surrounded her; and at her request Captain Gregory obtained a fly and saw her into it. As to Vic and Flossie, they had no intention of leaving till the small hours of the morning.

When the door was opened, it was by her father.

'O papa!' she exclaimed; 'how is it that you are sitting up?'

'Some one must do so,' he replied, 'as not one of you had the thought to take with you the house-key. As to the servants, I was not disposed to trust one of them to sit up alone, because—but never mind—I have my reasons. How is it that your sisters are not with you?'

'I had a headache, and so left early. Now do go to bed. I will sit up.'

'No, Anne, I have a book on gardening that interests me.'

'Papa, I will sit up with you.'

'But you have a headache.'

'Oh! that is better.'

He went back into his study and resumed his seat by the fire. His daughter followed him. She desired to have a few words with her father. His threat had filled her with alarm.

He was not in a good humour, that she could see.

'I suppose that Mrs. Dearmer is chaperoning the girls,' he said, taking up his book.

'No, papa, she is not there.'

'Not there! Why you—or rather Vic—assured me that she had asked Mrs. Dearmer to be your chaperon.'

'Yes, Vic did so, but Frank Dearmer is ill, and his mother could not leave him.'

'Then, who the deuce has taken charge of them?'

'Mrs. Dropwater.'

'Mrs. Dropwater!' echoed the Colonel, letting fall his book, and rising from his chair. 'Mrs. Dropwater! surely not.'

'Yes, papa; when Vic heard that Mrs. Dearmer could not take her to the ball,

she asked Mrs. Dropwater to supply her place.'

'I would never have consented. Why was I not told this? Mrs. Dropwater, indeed! My daughters under the chaperonage of that woman! Good heavens! do you know that all the better-class people will not know her? That several of my friends have forbidden their wives to call on her. She is disreputable.'

'Oh! surely this is scandal and is unfounded.'

'It is not unfounded. The woman is not a fit person to have young girls under her patronage to introduce at a ball.'

The Colonel walked about the room. He was very angry.

'Vic had no right whatever to ask her. She has behaved abominably in not consulting me. I allowed you all to go to the ball on the understanding that you went under Mrs. Dearmer's wing. If any change was contemplated, I should have been told, and my approval gained. That woman!'

'But, papa, Mrs. Maltravers invited her to Barley Place to her dance. She cannot have supposed her to be such an objectionable personage.'

'Mrs. Dropwater is Mrs. Maltravers' first cousin, and she could not withhold an invitation without provoking a family breach. Besides, she naturally endeavours to slur matters over, and give the woman a chance.'

'Papa, I am very sorry, it was quite an oversight.'

'When did you hear from Mrs. Dearmer?'

'I think yesterday.'

'Then Vic should at once have spoken to me. Anne, this has clinched matters. The condition to which affairs have come, or been brought, is quite intolerable. You all take your own courses regardless of every consideration except your own pleasures. Let me tell you something, Anne, something that has cut me to the quick. I was at the club the other day, sitting back in the window, reading the *Spectator*, when in came two young fellows, also members, and went to the fireplace and stood there, talking and joking. They did not observe me, and they discussed the coming ball at Barley Place. I did not pay attention to them, till I caught your names, and then it was too late for me to show myself. One of the young fellows asked the other whether he had already

secured any dances, booked with one or other of you—that is, with Vic or Flossie, for you were not at home; and the other answered, "No—they are in bad form."'

'Bad form, papa! Who said that?'

'I shall not tell you the name.'

'But did not you interrupt and contradict him?'

'How could I—when I knew too well that it was true?'

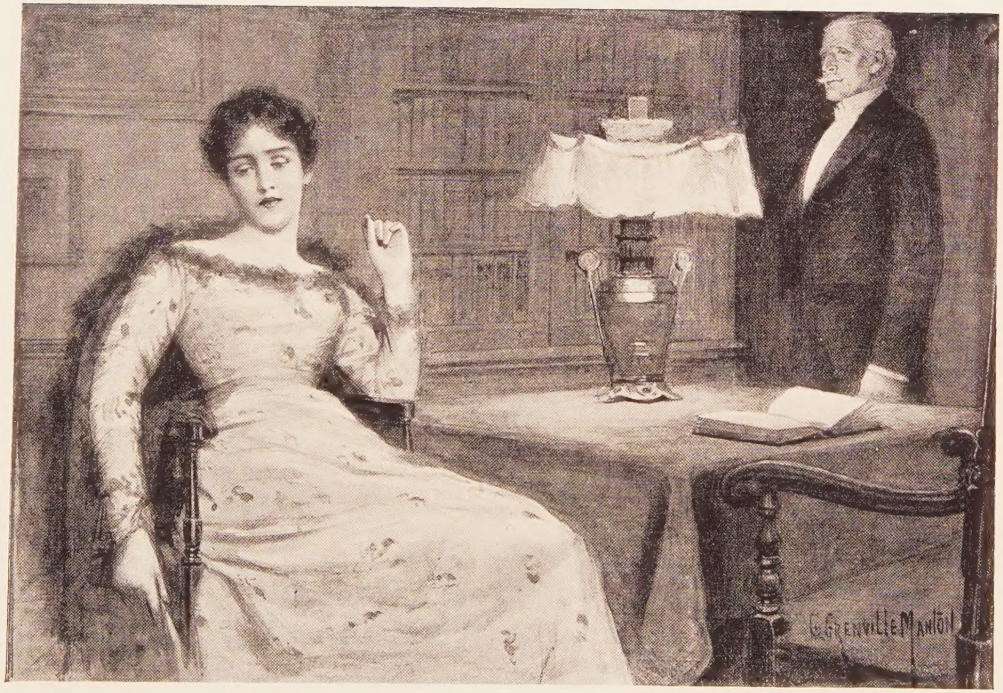
'O papa!' exclaimed Anne, colouring to the roots of her hair. 'How can we be bad form when we are ladies, and your daughters?'

'You are bad form,' retorted the Colonel. 'I do not say that it is wholly your fault, because you lost your natural guide when you were young. But your bent has ever been away from that which is direct and shapely—towards bad form.'

'But—in what way?'

'Is it not bad form, when you associate with such as are loud and boisterous—such as Cissey May, who will shout across the street to a male friend, and with Mrs. Purchess, who affects to dress as a man, and smokes cigarettes?'

'She is a most good-natured, kind-hearted woman.'



ANNE LOOKED DOWN. THE TEARS WERE RISING TO HER EYES. SHE WAS ANGRY AS WELL AS HURT

'That may be—but she is bad form. What other is that but bad form when you turn away from and designate as slow such girls as are quiet and self-respecting, and such as take pains to cultivate their minds and follow some pursuit. What do you call that, but bad form?'

Anne looked down. The tears were rising to her eyes. She was angry as well as hurt.

'And what is that but bad form,' continued the Colonel, 'when you consult no one's convenience, no one's feelings—call them, if you will, prejudices—but set up your own wills as your sole guides, and make your pleasures the sole objects to be driven at, at all costs?'

Anne said with choking voice, 'Papa, please do not exaggerate our bad conduct.'

'I am not exaggerating. Ask yourself frankly if it be not as I say. How is it with this household? Who looks after anything except in a desultory and half-hearted manner? The duties of a household are thrust aside to make way for your junketings and dissipation. Duties may go pack when a pleasure claims attention. Is it not so?'

He paused. Anne did not speak.

'How is it at table? You are all talking at one another, casting your frothy nonsense at each other over the board. Not one of you tries to enter into conversation with your father. Not one of you thinks of me. If I speak, you listen with undisguised impatience, and then burst forth into discussion of your own affairs again. I take it that this is indistinguishable from bad form.'

'I am very sorry. I never thought——'

'No, not one of you thinks of anything worth a thought, or of any person but yourselves. I did rejoice, Anne, when I learned that you had resolved to go into a nursing institution. I thought you had taken the seriousness of life to heart, and were going to turn over a new leaf. But I soon ascertained from the cackle of your sisters that you simply ran away from responsibilities because irksome, and in search of a new sensation. That, I take it, was bad form in one of its most objectionable aspects. And now—to ask that woman, Mrs. Dropwater, to chaperon you, without a word to me, that is unpardonable bad form.'

He had worked himself into a heat; he paced the room as he talked. Anne folded

her hands about her fan and held it athwart one knee. The tears were now raining down her cheeks. She was no longer angry. She was humbled.

'Papa,' she said, and there was a catch in her voice, 'I am profoundly sorry—more than I can express. I acknowledge that what you have said so far as it concerns myself is true. I have been in worse form than my sisters, for I was their senior, and should have set them an example. But we are young, full of animal spirits. You must make some allowance for the thoughtlessness and the exuberance of life in youth. We have gone our own way, I admit, and it has been a poor one. We have made mistakes, and I at least have received some sharp rebuffs from which I shall hardly recover. But, papa, if you will allow me, I will do all that is in my power in future to make amends for the past. I will look after domestic matters, and will try to make myself a companion to you. I will do all I can to restrain my sisters. What is past is also past recall, but we have the future before us, and——' she started up and threw her arms around her father's neck. 'Dear, dear daddy, I will devote all the rest of my time to you.'

'My dearest Anne,' answered the Colonel, softening immediately, and his eyes filled, 'I am sure that you mean it. I am sure that you would do it; but it is now too late.'

'How is that?' she asked in alarm.

'I have already requested Miss Kewe to become my wife.'

CHAPTER XIV

A PRIVY COUNCIL

'THIS is a weird go!' exclaimed Victoria.

The three sisters sat in conclave in their boudoir to consider the intended marriage of their father.

The room was pretty. It had on the walls engravings and water-colours, these latter bad in drawing and crude in colour—done by an amateur friend of Vic. Some of these hung crooked. Photographs in crowds, of girl acquaintances, occupied the chimney-piece. It was as though, like swallows, they had congregated there previous to taking their flight to other climes. There were more in frames on the tables. Flowers were about, cut and growing, but the water in the vases of the former had not been changed, was discoloured, and the flowers drooped. Those in pots were lanky, straining to the light. The rectification by

occasional turning them had not been adopted. A cyclamen was dry and dead through total neglect. The leaves of a camelia were white with dust, and a primula in the window was greasy and soiled with green fly.

Threads lay on the carpet, tangled with the nap, as well as a mother-of-pearl button, that was cracked by having been trodden on. A fur collar was trailing over the seat of an armchair, into which it had been cast the day before.

Torn-up and half-consumed letters strewed the hearth.

'A man of papa's age—what is his age, Anne?' asked Victoria.

'He is sixty-five.'

'Well,' said Vic, 'a man with one foot in the grave should be thinking of something else—such as billiards or whist—and not of matrimony.'

'It must be broken off,' observed Florence. 'We cannot suffer it.'

'Do you think, Anne,' put in Vic, 'that he is really meditating a proposal?'

'He certainly assured me, not that he was meditating such a thing, but that he had already asked Miss Kewe——'

'Miss Kewe!' jeered Flossie, interrupt-

ing her eldest sister; 'a woman who has been a finishing governess!'

'Yes,' said Anne; 'but she is well connected.'

'I take it,' said Vic, 'that he wants her to finish you off, Flossie.'

'She shall not have the chance,' said the youngest. 'With my consent she shall not enter the house. If we all three protest firmly, but respectfully and seriously, papa must give way.'

'I do not suppose he will,' observed Anne; 'he appeared to me to be resolved on the point.'

'But if we take up a decided attitude, and say that we will not have it?'

'It will make him stubborn,' said Vic; 'I know how it is with papa. He draws his upper lip in till he can chew his moustache, hangs his ears, and looks as if his face were cut out of a holly stick.'

'Well,' said Florence, 'we can wheedle him out of it. I got sixteen guineas from him for a bicycle last summer, by being affectionate for a week.'

'It will take a lot of trouble to get him extricated from this entanglement,' said Anne meditatively. 'You see—if he has

committed himself—there is Miss Kewe to be reckoned with as well.'

'Oh, he must tell her that he has met with so much opposition at home that he is constrained to break off the engagement.'

'But what if she refuses to allow it to be broken off?' asked Anne.

'My dear child,' said Vic, 'you are right. She will stick to him with all her teeth, just as a ferret clings to a rabbit. These old maids always do that when they have a chance of a bite.'

'If we can talk papa over,' observed Florence, 'I think we shall be able to contrive it. We will ask Miss Kewe to tea, and then get some shaving-soap, worked into a lather, into papa's mouth, and make him reel and fall on the floor. Then, Anne, you say that it is only one of papa's epileptic fits, and you, Vic, add that we fear the result will be softening of the brain.'

'She will see through it,' said Vic.

'I very much fear,' remarked Anne, 'that if we did induce papa to break off his engagement, she would sue for breach of promise. That would make a high scandal.'

'Oh! scandal!' said Vic, 'I don't care three skips of a grasshopper for that. It is the damages I am afraid of. At what sum

do you suppose, Anne, that these would be assessed?'

'I have not the remotest conception.'

'It can't be much. If she had been young and slim, pretty and interesting-looking, the jury would assess the sum high.'

'Why so?'

'Because the jury are men.'

'But such an old cat as the Kewe!' exclaimed Flossie. 'Pshaw!'

'I don't know,' said Anne, shaking her head. 'Papa is the Honourable, and they will take that into consideration.'

'Well,' said Vic, 'I don't mind helping papa out a bit, and so I am sure will you, Anne. We will each contribute fifty pounds.'

'And I will give an I O U for another fifty,' said Florence, 'to be paid when I am of age, and come in for mamma's money.'

A hundred and fifty will go no way.'

'Well,' said Victoria, 'papa must stump up the rest. He has done a foolish thing, and must suffer for it. It will be a good lesson, and teach him to be wiser for the future.'

'We will have a bazaar to help him out,' said Florence. 'I will get Cissey May to

do some water-colours, and Mrs. MacTurk to send us a box of Black Forest pottery from Baden-Baden, that always sells well. Then Miss Lawson makes the drollest little bishops out of chickens' merrythoughts. She dresses them up in lawn sleeves and black satin, and they sell for a shilling each.'

'Nonsense!' said Anne. 'This is preposterous.'

'Well, then'—the unabashed Flossie was full of expedients—'we will pack up our goods and go to Switzerland for the summer, and to Mentone for the winter, and then cruise about on the Mediterranean, and not return to England till the storm has blown over. They can't serve a writ or a warrant on papa if they don't know where to find him.'

'If papa is stubborn and marries again, I shall not remain in this house,' said Vic peremptorily.

'Nor can I,' said Anne.

'Nor will I,' threw in Florence.

'You cannot help yourself, Flossie,' retorted Victoria. 'You are a minor, and have only so much pin-money as papa chooses to allow you. Anne and I, on the other hand, have our little incomes, and are independent. You must remain.'

'I shall go visiting.'

'But you cannot go visiting all the year round, nor can you do so without money, and papa holds the purse-strings.'

'Well,' said Anne, 'the first step to be taken is to endeavour to persuade papa out of it. He may not, as yet, have irretrievably committed himself. If we can induce him to abandon his purpose, after that we shall be able to concert measures how to negotiate with La Kewe.'

'Anne, you are right. How is it to be effected?' asked Vic.

'I know,' exclaimed Flossie. 'We will take papa out for a drive in the dogcart, and so we shall have him—in a trap.'

'Yes,' approved Vic. 'And I will drive. It will never do for him to hold the reins; if we were to fall on him about this miserable business whilst he is driving he might lose his nerve, and let the horse down; and I should be awfully sorry if Rosina broke her knees. I will drive, and have papa beside me; then Anne and Flossie can sit behind and back me up.'

'Not so,' objected Anne; 'I will not go. Two behind in the dogcart are too heavy, and overbalance it, besides being most uncomfortable, and the one of us sisters

who sits back to back with papa cannot conveniently join in the conversation. One will suffice. It is a delicate matter; do not be too abrupt with him, or you will upset the whole kettle of fish.'

'All right, Anne,' acquiesced the youngest; 'I will sit behind. But how papa could think of Miss Kewe beats me.'

'She is a managing woman,' remarked Anne, 'and that is one reason why papa has spotted her. We have not managed the house over well, and he looks out for a change.'

'Yes,' said Vic; 'and she will want to manage us. But that she shall never do. There will be ructions if she gets her foot on our threshold, if I am here.'

'Hist! here is papa! At him, girls!'

CHAPTER XV

ENTRAPPED

FLOSSIE ran to her father, caught his arm, and cuddling into his side, asked in a fondling tone: 'Oh, pappy darling! you will go a drive with us after lunch, will you not?'

'Whither are you going, my dear?' inquired the Colonel, somewhat surprised at this exhibition of affection.

'We must go to Wardlaw, and inquire of Mrs. Lawson for her sister who fell downstairs and sprained her ankle. It is but civil and kind. It will be so pretty if you will go as well. Then we shall have the pleasure of your society.'

'Who go?'

'Vic and I. Anne is remaining at home; she has some letters to write. Vic will drive, and, papa, you need not get your fingers cold. You know that you have chilblains on them. I will have the foot-warmer put in, so that your dear old toes shall be cosy.'

'You are vastly considerate, all at once. I suppose you want to wheedle me out of some money.'

'Oh no, papa! I'm not in debt again,—that is to say, not much, nothing to signify,' said Flossie.

'Well, I will accompany you. I have the blues on me, and the fresh air may dispel them.'

'Oh! thank you, darling pappy, that will be a treat!' exclaimed the treacherous Florence.

Not much was spoken during lunch. The old Colonel was not himself; his liver was in the sulks, because denied its periodic drench of Hunyadi Janos water, the bottle that generally stood on the Colonel's dressing-table having been emptied a week ago, and not replaced. The girls were, moreover, in no conversational mood, reserving themselves for the effort to be made when they had their father to themselves in the dog-cart, and no servants present.

The trap was brought round to the front door, and Victoria mounted and gaily took the reins and the whip. The Colonel ascended to the seat beside her, and Florence swung herself up behind.

Anne looked after them, as the mare spun

away with the load, and smiled. 'Poor papa, he little knows what he is in for. I don't think the girls will succeed, but the venture is worth making,' she said to herself.

The attack was not begun till they were well out of the town, and were between hedges.

Then Vic, turning her head, said, 'Papa, you are not seriously bad, are you?'

'No, my dear, only a little liverish.'

'I mean—your heart. You are not really in love with Miss Kewe?'

'My dear girl, if you mean that I am not going to marry her, you are egregiously mistaken.'

Then Flossie turned, and kneeling on the back seat, and holding to the back, dashed into the fray.

'Pappy!' she exclaimed, 'this won't do. We forbid the banns. We have not been consulted, and we object.'

'I am sorry to hear you speak like this. It is settled. You must make up your minds to the inevitable.'

'But it won't do. We will not have her. There will be broils if she is brought into the house, and we can make ourselves uncommonly offensive if we put our minds to it.'

'Of that I have not the remotest doubt; but I shall take care that you are deprived of the power to be disagreeable, however willing you may be to exercise it.'

'But, pappy, you will drive us all away. We cannot, and we will not stay in the house with Miss Kewe.'

'She will no longer be Miss Kewe when she comes into the house.'

'Don't be grumpy, there's a darling,' said Flossie, stretching forward, and applying a kiss to her father's cheek. 'You must consider our happiness. You are in duty bound to do so. Remember we depend on you, we have no other protector.'

'Look here, papa,' said Vic; 'don't let this proceed to the bitter end. You are not in, over head and ears. Draw out whilst there is time. Marriage is a very serious matter, and is not to be taken in hand lightly. You should well weigh the pros and cons before committing yourself for life to a woman of whom you really know nothing, or next to nothing. You have passed out of the hot and impulsive age of green hobbledehoyhood. I believe if you had taken your regular dose of Hunyadi Janos, you would not have fallen in love.'

'We must get the dear old daddy out of

it,' said Flossie. 'You have not committed yourself publicly, I trust. No letters full of raptures and flames have passed between you.'

The Colonel made no answer.

'Well dad, Sophie French is engaged to a nice young man, really clever. He is a lawyer with Mr. Turvey. We will bring him into consultation, and will get you extricated somehow.'

'I have no intention of being extricated.'

'But you must be, against your will,' said Vic, as she lashed the mare. 'We do not always know what is best for us. We are not going to allow you to throw yourself away in a fit of romance. If you will not look after yourself, you must allow us to take charge of you.'

'My dear Vic, you should not talk like this. The matter is settled,' said the Colonel.

'No, papa, it is not settled, if we do not consent to it, and that we will not do. You have parental feelings and a warm fatherly heart. We have no mother, and we look on you as papa and mamma rolled into one. We can admit no fresh party to intervene and to separate us.'

'I don't see that there is any serious

difficulty in it,' said Flossie from behind. 'If papa hasn't written any letter, if there is no compromising note to Miss Kewe, she can make nothing out of it in a law-court. Papa has only to say that when he asked her the question, he was propounding a conundrum, and meant nothing serious.'

'I am not going against my word,' said the Colonel.

'You need not do so—say it was a joke; make out some sort of riddle such as this: What turns a Will-it into a Quillet? Answer —a Kewe.'

'Let me out; I will walk,' said the Colonel.

'On no account, papa. You promised to accompany us to Mrs. Lawson's, and as you are such a stickler for your word, we will hold you to your promise made to us.'

'I know how to work it,' said Florence, thrusting her head in between her sister and her father. 'If papa objects to breaking it off, and I can quite appreciate his high sense of honour; cannot you, Vic?'

'Oh, quite.'

'Well then, we will make her do it.'

'That will not be so easily effected,' said Vic; 'papa is such a catch, such a gentle-

man, with such a good name, and is so handsome.'

'It can be done,' persisted Florence. 'If papa does not mind, we will get some doctor's stuff, and have him rubbed over with it—stuff that will bring out a red rash. Then, when he calls on Miss Kewe, he will fidget himself uneasily, and she can be told that he is a martyr to eczema. We will keep it up for three weeks or a month, and then, to a dead certainty, she will break off the engagement.'

'No,' protested Vic, 'she will only hurry on the nuptials, so that she may carry papa off to one of the German baths for that sort of thing. I know a better plan. We will engage a manservant. It shan't cost you anything, papa. Annie and I will bear the expense. If you do not mind a little discomfort, we will scratch a line round your throat with a needle; just a scratch, it really will not hurt. And we will say that you were seen flourishing your razor in a wild manner, and that we had great difficulty in getting it from you. The man shall pass as a keeper. But we shall give out that he is our butler. No one will believe that. Miss Kewe will be frightened and hang fire.'

'No,' threw in Flossie, 'that won't do. It will get about that there is insanity in the family, and we shall never get engaged; in consequence, I vote for eczema.'

'Here we are at Mrs. Lawson's door,' said Vic. 'Jump off, Flossie; ring the bell and make inquiries.'

'Had we not better both go in?'

'Very well. Papa, will you be good enough to hold the reins. We shall not be two minutes away.'

The Colonel accepted the ribbons, and his daughters entered the house. Mrs. Lawson received the girls cordially, and insisted on ordering up tea.

Instead of their being absent for two minutes they were in the house for a quarter of an hour.

When they came out the dogcart was gone.

'Where is papa?' they asked simultaneously.

'Please, miss,' said a groom, 'the Colonel has drove away, and he left word that he thought a walk home would be a good constitutional for you both, ladies.'

Accordingly the girls were obliged to return on foot.

When they reached home, somewhat

indignant at their treatment, they went in quest of their father, and found him in the study.

'O papa! how ungallant of you!'

'My dears, I thought it best to drive at once to Miss Kewe's, and ask her to name the day.'

'O papa!'

'And she has named next Thursday week.'

CHAPTER XVI

GHOSTS

'I SHALL clear out at once,' said Victoria.

'So shall I,' said Florence. 'And you, Anne?'

'We cannot all leave the house whilst papa is away. It is not as though we had servants whom we could trust. It is hardly fair on papa.'

'Oh! as to that,' said Vic, 'I don't see that we need consider him, as he has not considered us. He is gadding about with Miss Kewe.'

'She is Miss Kewe no longer.'

'I don't care. I shall never think of her as other.'

'But, for all that, she is actually now the Honourable Mrs. Quillet.'

'It is hateful. Well, if papa is on his honeymoon, pirouetting with the Kewe in the Isle of Wight, I shall pack up my traps and go,' said Vic.

'And I as well,' threw in Florence.

'Let the house take care of itself,' said Vic; 'it is his affair, now that La Kewe is coming to reign over it.'

'I shall remain in charge,' observed Anne; 'we are in a measure to blame for his marriage. We have driven papa into it by our neglect of his comforts.'

'Oh! he has that for his excuse, has he, poor man?' exclaimed Vic. 'I never heard yet of a widower who had not brave disinterested reasons to justify his following his fancy and tacking on a Number Two.'

'If papa thinks he will be happier by this marriage, he has a right to consult his interests,' said Anne.

'But we have our rights also, and they have not been considered.'

'I am not so sure of that,' said Anne.

'I do not say,' pursued Vic, 'that papa has been guilty of a crime in marrying again. As the Apostle says, "All things are lawful, but all things are not expedient," and this applies to his saddling us with a finishing governess as a second mamma. We—that is, you, Anne, and I—are grown-up girls, and will have none of her. I presume he has thrown himself away for the

sake of Flossie, that she may have a suitable person to form her mind. Widowers are so self-sacrificing, they marry for the good of their darlings; or else they take a Number Two as a compliment to the memory of Number One. They were so happy with the dear departed, that they must fill the void—and what could be a prettier attention to Number One than that? I know their tricks and their ways.'

'Anne,' said Flossie, 'lend me some money. I have not got much, and I shall stay away till every penny is expended. I will give you an I O U, payable when I get my next quarter—or if you will not be a Jew, till I come of age.'

'I cannot lend you much. You are always running into debt. As soon as you get your allowance, you begin spending with both hands, and do not consider your unpaid bills till you are dunned again. Remember, that you owe me for the wedding present to Janet Milton. You were to join with Vic and me in giving her something really handsome; nothing else would do. Well, Vic has paid up promptly, but you have not thought fit to remember your obligation. I know per-

fectly that you have bills unmet from the dressmaker and at the jeweller.'

'These can wait. But I must have money to keep away.'

'Well, I will see how far I can assist you. I shall probably leave as soon as papa and his wife arrive.'

'I should not wait for the Kewe, if I were you,' said Vic. 'It would serve papa right if he were to bring home his elderly bride and find no one here to receive her; the house not ready, no dinner ordered, no fires lighted—all higglety-pigglety.'

'It would not be right,' answered Anne; 'not right for us to treat papa in this manner; and it would not be kind to his wife. How would you, Vic, like to arrive in your new home, when married, and be treated with such discourtesy?'

'Bah! the cases are different. I shall never marry a widower with grown-up daughters.'

'And,' said Flossie, 'it would be giving papa a lesson not to do it again.'

For a while the excitement caused by her father's marriage, and the society of her sisters discussing their altered position and their prospects, as well as the problem of her own future, engaged Anne's mind,

and thrust into the background the reminiscence of events at Westport.

But she was, nevertheless, ever conscious of a root of bitterness in the ground of her heart, a sense of dull ache, that might be repressed for a while, but would persistently reassert itself.

No sooner were her sisters departed, and she was left alone in the house, to sit solitary in the drawing-room or boudoir, to take her meals alone, than the spectres of Thomas the porter, and Mr. Marmaduke the solicitor, rose before her, no more to be obscured, not any more to be laid.

She took a novel and read hard, endeavoured to interest herself in the plot, in the characters, to become amused at the smartness of the dialogue, but it was futile. Ever and anon the haunting trouble rose again. A word, a situation in the story roused it to vigorous activity. She could now understand how that a crime hung on the conscience of its perpetrator, and weighed upon it, embittering his after-life. She caught herself in sympathy with the wretch, thrilled with his fears, tortured with his self-reproach, when she read a criminal novel.

There are weeds that you may reap

down, dig up, and hope to exterminate, but of which, if the merest fibre remains, you are thwarted in your object. It contains in itself such vital force, such reproductive capacity, that it speedily spreads and occupies as much soil as before. It is the same with the conscientious trouble. It can be beaten down, it cannot be torn out.

But one solace presented itself to Anne as possible. What amends could she make? There were none possible. Thomas was dead, and his girl had long ago been told of her loss, had wept her blind eyes red, and had been consoled. Mr. Marmaduke had lost his sight, and no oculist could restore it to him. If Anne could have surrendered her own eyes, she really would have been prepared to do so, to purchase ease of conscience by that means. That would be better even than the undying sense of having ruined a man's career, and than that he should live to curse her daily as the destroyer of all that made life precious to him.

And yet a solace did offer. She might do some work that would help to alleviate the load of suffering there was in the world.

To divert her mind, Anne looked into the management of the household; and in so doing, found much that was unsatisfactory. She wisely deemed that it was not expedient to make material alterations. If she held the reins of government, it was but to surrender them in a few days into the hands of another. But she let the domestics understand that a new spirit had entered into the house, that a change was about to be made in the mode in which it had been conducted, or rather had been suffered to shuffle along.

She became aware of wanton waste, of neglect, of slovenliness, even of dishonesty. She examined the bills, and convinced herself that the tradesmen, if not in league with the servants, were winking at their dishonesty. They suffered them to order for the house articles that were not wanted, and never reached the house itself.

But Anne could not do more than restrain present unthrift; she had no heart for revolutionary measures.

She must leave these to the new mistress.

Of course Vic and Flossie had left their rooms in the most utter confusion, littered with rubbish, and with good articles of clothing abandoned along with trash. Anne

made a servant sort what was left, and put everything in order. She watered the plants in the boudoir, dusted the camelia leaves, righted the crooked pictures, and stooped to gather up the broken button and the strands of silk.

Occasionally she went to the piano, played and sang some of her songs. She possessed fair execution with her fingers, and a rich mezzo-soprano voice, but she had not hitherto troubled herself to practise further than was sufficient to enable her to perform after a dinner-party, in the conventional manner, as a cover to allow conversation to be carried on in an undertone.

And now, she found small satisfaction in resuming her practice. It would not be tolerable for her to continue in the house. That was unquestionable.

Then came back to her the desire to do something useful, some work that would calm her fretted mind, and restore to her some of the self-respect that she had lost.

She had an acquaintance—she could hardly be called a friend—one, Margery Payne, a young woman who was supposed to be devoted to charitable works in a poor neighbourhood. Anne thought that possibly she might herself find that ease

of mind she desired by some such work as that undertaken by Miss Payne, and in the same locality. So she wrote to her acquaintance, and proposed a visit, not exactly to her—she did not know her sufficiently to impose herself upon Miss Payne, who might not have a spare room for the accommodation of a visitor—but a visit to her neighbourhood. She asked Margery Payne to take lodgings for her temporarily near, so that she might see the work done by Margery, and see at the same time whether it was such as would suit her. She frankly confided to the lady to whom she wrote what was her position, how altered by her father's marriage, and how that she felt a desire to be engaged in some profitable occupation.

The letter concluded, Anne seated herself before the fire and fell a-musing once more, as she had done repeatedly of late; and again the past—that brief period at Westport, unrolled its series of pictures before her. She recalled every word that had been spoken by the sick man in that conversation with her at night, and they conveyed to her quite a different meaning from what they had then. Perhaps the soil of her

heart was now softer and more open to receive such seed.

'Well,' said Anne to herself; 'I trust that now I shall have left off discharging nought but shot rubbish into the dust-heap of time, and that my days henceforth will not be wholly empty, worthless —mere wreckage.'

'Captain Gregory!' announced the parlourmaid.

CHAPTER XVII

WHY?

ANNE started to her feet to tell the maid to deny her to visitors; but it was too late, the captain was in the room.

She was conscious that her cheeks were glowing, partly the result of sitting over the fire, partly because of the fever of her own mind. She coloured deeper as she met the captain's extended hand.

'I am alone,' she said ungraciously. 'I hardly expected a call.'

'And perhaps for that very reason I have intruded,' retorted the captain. 'You must find it solitary without your sisters and father; so all your friends and neighbours are bound to come about you to cheer you.'

'It is a kindly thought,' said Anne, 'but really I have been too much engaged to find time hang heavy on my hands and to desire society.'

'And—if I may venture to ask such a

question—is that likely which I am told, that your sisters will not return?'

'Florence certainly will have to do so. But Vic and I—'

'Are you also leaving?'

'Yes. We consider it will be best in many ways that my stepmother should find the coast clear, so that she may make her own dispositions unhampered by our presence. It would be an unpleasant situation for her, and one it would not be fair for us to put her into, to have to recast the arrangements in the household with our eyes watching, and with the knowledge that, behind her back, we were criticising every change. Moreover, it is more grateful to my pride to lay down my sceptre, and allow her to pick it up, than to have her loosen my fingers from it, and wrench it out of my grasp.'

'Then you leave also, and shortly?'

'Yes, so soon as papa returns. Victoria and Florence are paying a round of visits to their girl friends, and eventually, I dare say, Vic and I will settle somewhere into a neat little cottage together.'

'I can hardly realise what this place will be without you. You will be sorely missed.'

'Why?'

'Why?' echoed Captain Gregory. 'Why —of course.'

'But why should we be missed?'

'Of course you will be missed.'

'But why?'

Captain Gregory was taken aback. He was not a clever man, nor ready at repartee. He had no intellectual agility. He turned the question over in his head in search of an appropriate compliment in reply, such as he supposed Anne was fishing for.

'No,' said she. 'I cannot see why we should be missed. The dressmaker and milliner will miss our custom, the milkman will serve a pint less of his condiment every morning, and the baker will not leave as many hot rolls for breakfast. The charitable societies will not miss us, as we have spent so much on ourselves that we have had only half-crowns for foreign missions and the poor at home. Our subscriptions to the golf and tennis clubs have been paid up to midsummer. I cannot see that we shall be missed by other than those who have had our custom.'

'Really, Miss Quillet, you appreciate yourself unwarrantably low.'

'Not at all. I have had ten days here wholly to myself in which to muse on this

very question. Why should we be missed? We are not brilliant talkers, we are but mediocrities in music, we play tennis tolerably, and are passable dancers. As to our place on the golf links and in the racquet court, they will be taken by the Misses Wilks.'

'No, surely, Miss Quillet. None can take your places.'

'Why should we be missed?—Come to facts. Last week a couple of palings of our garden fence were broken, and there was an ugly gap. Dogs got in and scratched up our flower-beds. But a carpenter put in new wooden slips, painted them green, and all is as before. We have been members of a social palisade, that is all—painted laths. When we are gone there will be a gap for a few days, and the Misses Wilks will occupy our places; in a fortnight we shall be forgotten. For what that we have said or done or been can we be missed? The summer before last Florence kept silkworms. She had much trouble in keeping them supplied with mulberry leaves. They ate voraciously, but in the end spun cocoons of yellow silk in the corners of their box. We have eaten and drunk, and clothed ourselves, and have crawled about

for a good many years, but as yet have spun no cocoons, have not begun a single end of silk fibre. We have been consumers only, not producers. Why then should we be missed?'

Captain Gregory looked helplessly in Anne's face—he was at a loss for words.

'You infinitely surprise me,' he said after a long pause. 'I have never heard you speak in this self-depreciating vein before.'

'Because I have not before had ten days of solitary meditation in which to appraise myself. Consider, Captain Gregory, the poor earth-worm, which is a mere digesting tube, sans eyes, sans ears, sans brain, sans hands and feet; what a function it discharges in the economy of nature. It carries the refuse under the soil, it buries everything broken, decaying, foul, beneath the soil. It renews annually the face of the earth. But we—we sisters Quillet—what have we done but spread waste around us? We tread the earth-worm under foot, but it serves a higher purpose than do we—at least than do I.'

'Miss Anne,' said Captain Gregory gravely, 'do you not think that you and your sisters have been fulfilling a purpose

CAPTAIN GREGORY LOOKED HELPLESSLY INTO ANNE'S FACE

in appearing before us bright, pleasant, innocent, and sweet types of healthy, honest maidenhood? And that which you deprecate may be the initial stage, preparatory to that which is more serious, when the duties of life press on you, and you give yourselves up unreservedly to their discharge. When you looked into the box where the worms were nibbling mulberry leaves, you might have judged them harshly as unproductive insects, mere consumers, and as wasting what they did not devour. But the time came to them all, when they turned to the work for which they were created, and spun their cocoons. You young girls have been engaged in accumulating a store of health, happiness, and vigour for the tasks which will one day be yours to perform.'

'But will that day ever arrive?'

'I have made this call to-day to propose one such to you, Miss Quillet. I have long admired and loved you—and I am here—'

'O Captain Gregory!' she raised her hands in deprecation, and turned pale. 'I implore you—say no more.'

'Why not? Do you dislike me?'

'No, indeed, no. I value you as a good,

honourable man. There is none other whose friendship I value more highly.'

'Then, why?—it is now my place to put the Why? and that to you.'

'Captain Gregory, you were unable to answer my query, and I am not in a position to answer yours. You do not know—but I do—how that already you have spoken the word that makes what you would ask impossible for me to accord.'

'What word?'

'I cannot answer,' she said in distress, and drops formed on her lashes.

He looked earnestly into her face, and saw how profound was her distress, how deadly was her pallor.

'O Captain Gregory! you do not know, but some day you must know, how impossible it is for me to give to you at this time the answer you desire. Do not—oh! do not press me for a reply to that Why?'

CHAPTER XVIII

THE SECOND MRS. QUILLET

'THERE is the bell!'

Anne sprang forward with a sigh of relief. 'Papa and his new wife have arrived.'

Captain Gregory rose, and followed Anne into the hall.

The parlourmaid was already at the front door.

The flyman let down the steps, and allowed Colonel Quillet to descend. Then the Colonel held out his hand to assist his wife out of the conveyance. The cabman busied himself about the boxes, helped to convey them into the hall, and haggled with the Colonel for an extra fee.

The new wife ascended the steps and entered the house, that was thenceforth to be hers.

She was a middle-aged woman, wore a dove-coloured dress and white veil, a dress intended to announce to every one that she

was a bride. She was tall; the complexion appeared leathery through contrast with the white about her head.

She took Anne's hand and stooped to kiss her on the brow, then turned and made a stiff bow to Captain Gregory. She knew him by sight, but was not acquainted with him.

'Captain Gregory—Mrs. Quillet!' said Anne, slightly colouring.

The captain congratulated the lady, hoped she had enjoyed fine weather, and the scenery of the Isle of Wight, and then departed from the hall.

'Anne,' said the lady, 'rather extraordinary, is it not? Has he called often during your father's absence?'

'It is his first visit,' replied Anne.

'Where are the other girls?' inquired the bride. 'They should have been here to receive me.'

'They are from home,' replied Anne; and then hastily added, 'There is just an hour and a half before dinner. We have been expecting you, and all is ready.'

Colonel Quillet was still without; he had settled with the driver to the satisfaction of the latter, and was shaking hands cordially with the captain.

His wife awaited him, and became impatient. 'Edward!' she called.

Anne winced.

With alacrity the Colonel ran up the steps and replied, 'Yes, dear!' Anne flew into her father's arms, and the tears came into her eyes as she kissed him. 'You dear old daddy!' she said, and sobbed, 'Oh! I hope you will be happy now.'

During the short time that Mrs. Quillet had been in the hall, Anne had seen sufficient to convince herself that she would not like her. There was condescension in the way in which she had kissed her stepdaughter.

Mrs. Quillet was obviously swelling with elation and self-importance due to her being a bride.

Like other middle-aged spinsters who have changed their condition she despised raw girls, and was prepared to regard young married women as intruders on a state of life that belonged by special prerogative to those who had advanced to riper years.

It was of small consequence to Anne whether she liked her stepmother, as she had no intention of living under her wing; but it was of serious consideration to her

whether her father had made a selection conducive to his happiness.

And Mrs. Quillet was nettled at the implied query in the hope expressed by Anne, when clasped to her father's breast. She was quite sure that she would not like her stepdaughter.

Anne was satisfied that this woman would rule the household, and probably rule it correctly. But there lay before her the temptation, presenting the zest of novelty, of endeavouring to hector and subdue the man who had committed himself to her hands, and a doubt existed in Anne's mind whether Mrs. Quillet would be willing or able to forgo the attempt.

Colonel Quillet was a man who loved his ease, was content so long as everything went smoothly in the house ; but who was liable to break out in sudden explosions of temper, and to speak strongly, should some untoward matter arise that hurt his sense of decorum, or interfered with the tranquil tenour of his life. Then, to use Flossie's irreverent expression, 'he went a buster.'

When Mrs. Quillet descended the stairs to dinner, Anne was made aware of her approach before she appeared in the draw-

ing-room, by the rustle of her dress upon the stairs. Upon her entrance, Anne saw that she had assumed her bridal array of white satin and lace, worn rather low in the bust, considering her age, and with orange-flowers in her hair. It was clearly her intention to underline the first impression she had made.

Anne was dressed quietly, as for an ordinary dinner when no visitors were expected.

'It is a pity I did not think to invite Captain Gregory to stay for dinner,' said the Colonel on entering; 'then there would have been some one to take you in, Anne. I must give my arm to my wife.'

'I think,' said Mrs. Quillet severely, 'that it was hardly consistent with propriety for Anne to receive visits from single gentlemen when her parents were from home.'

'How, then,' retorted Anne sharply, 'did you manage your interviews with papa? But perhaps age makes all the difference.'

'Come, come,' said the Colonel hastily. 'Here is Susan to announce dinner. Hannah, take my arm.'

Anne was prepared to surrender her accustomed seat at the head of the table,

but she felt a qualm when Mrs. Quillet, without a word of acknowledgment, took the place she had occupied for so many years. The Quillets kept no butler, only a parlourmaid, and the girl now took round the soup.

Mrs. Quillet wore long white gloves. These she took off and rolled up and placed on one side. Anne noticed that she wore a bracelet that had belonged to her own mother, and which the Colonel had now given to his second wife. Anne somewhat resented this. She looked at her step-mother's fingers. They were ill formed, broadening at the extremities, and very flat. It was a symbol, she thought, of want of tact. The lady saw that Anne was observant of the defect, and curled up her fingers, with an impatient gesture.

Not much conversation passed during the time that soup was on the table, but when the fish was served—'Turbot,' said the Colonel, 'and very nicely boiled, I should say. You will take some fish, Hannah?'

'Thank you, Edward, a little.'

Presently the maid took round the wine.

'Sherry, madam?'

'No, thank you, no!' very emphatically.

'Claret, madam?'

'Certainly not.'

'Perhaps you take whisky and water. There is some on the sideboard,' said Anne.

'I take no alcoholic drinks. I take only water and tea,' said Mrs. Quillet in a hard tone.

'Susan,' said Anne, 'sherry for me, and you may fill my claret glass as well. I think,' she added, 'that the two beverages we have to be on our guard against are water, which is the vehicle for the conveyance of the germs of typhoid, diphtheria and other diseases; and tea, that ruins the digestion and wrecks the nerves.'

'Will you have shrimp sauce?' asked the Colonel quickly, aware that a jar had occurred.

'Thank you, Edward, no. Shellfish does not agree with me.'

Anne, fearing that a rupture was imminent, thought to avert it, but she bore resentment in her heart. She loved her father, and she was every moment becoming more convinced that a sad prospect was opening before him.

Those paddles of fingers! What could you expect from a woman with such as they?

To turn the subject, she said, 'The Isle of Wight can hardly have shown to advantage in winter.'

'The Isle of Wight is eminently interesting at all seasons,' replied her stepmother. 'Your father and I were particularly struck with the formation of the chalk-beds, and we obtained an instructive section at the Black Gang Chine. Moreover it was a privilege to be appreciated to be able to walk round Osborne, the residence of our beloved Queen. We also viewed The Needles, and observed the corrosion effected by the sea. We likewise made an excursion to Carisbrooke Castle, and saw its interesting well. It is a castle, as you are perhaps aware, with historic associations. It was for a while the residence of Charles the First; it was there that the Princess Elizabeth, his eldest and favourite daughter, died and was buried.'

'Yes,' said Anne, forgetting her good resolutions in her irritation; 'and if your memory fails you, I have Murray's handbook in another room, that may serve to refresh it.'

'The mind of the traveller,' said Mrs. Quillet severely, 'is one or other, either like the sighting-glass of a camera or the

receptive plate within. The former reflects what is presented before it but receives no impression; on the educated mind, as a sensitive film, an indelible trace is left.'

At desert Anne rose abruptly, when her stepmother opened her eyes and directed on her a stony gaze, supposing that the girl had given the signal to leave the table. But this was not her intent; she went to the sideboard, and brought thence a case which she set before her father.

'Here, papa, are the cigarettes.'

'Oh,' said the late Miss Kewe, 'not here, if you please, Edward. If it must be, then I shall be greatly obliged if you will smoke in your own private apartment.'

Then she stood up and left the room.

Anne followed; but a few minutes later went to the study, where was her father seated before a comfortable fire, smoking, and reading the evening paper.

'Anne, dear,' said he reproachfully, 'you were not over polite to my wife.'

'Papa, I am very sorry. My nerves are upset, and I saw mamma's bracelet on her arm. O papa, I hope you have no objection to raise to my departure to-morrow.'

'Why?—Whither are you going?'

'At first to my friend Margery Payne.

What my further movements will be I do not as yet know. Nothing is decided.'

He sighed. 'My dear, I married to give you a mother who would bring you into some sort of order, and I find you all running away.'

'I think it is best so for your happiness. It will prevent a great deal of friction and consequent annoyance to you. O papa! do not let Miss Kewe—I mean the new Mrs. Quillet—rob you of all your little comforts. Here is the key to your spirit-case. Susan shall bring up the hot water.'

CHAPTER XIX

IN THE SLUMS

'YES, miss!' said the cabman.

Anne had given the direction—'No. 4 Windsor Terrace.'

He now mounted the box, and drove from the station. Her luggage was on the roof.

As soon as the vehicle was in motion, she drew from her hand-bag a letter and proceeded to read it:—

'DEAR MISS QUILLET,—Your letter surprised and gratified me—surprised and gratified me, because it showed that you thought of me. But I must add that it gave me a touch of disappointment to qualify my pleasure. That is due to your emphatically insisting that you will not thrust yourself—to employ your own expression—on my hospitality. Indeed you should not have been so squeamish. I would have been delighted to take you in. I have a

second bedroom, which would have been wholly at your service. But as you are so peremptory, I have deemed it advisable to conform strictly to your instructions. I am at No. 6 in the same row, so there is only one intervening tenement.

'You must clearly understand that the lodgings are small, and are situated in the least desirable part of this large city. But Mrs. Wallis, the landlady, is a tidy, respectable woman, and you may reckon on everything in the house being clean. What her cooking powers are, I have no means of saying, but I fear they are not of a high quality. Still, she can doubtless roast a fowl, do potato-chips, and accomplish a rice-pudding.

'One thing I must exhort you to avoid—an American travelling ark. I am sure that it would be difficult to get it into the little lobby, and impossible to convey it up the narrow and tortuous staircase. There is a sitting-room, with a small back apartment, and there are two bedrooms. I endeavoured to engage for you only one of these latter, but Mrs. Wallis would not let her lodgings piecemeal.

'Now as to your purpose in coming here, —I can thoroughly appreciate it; but you do

not inform me what has made you think of this place, above all others, for it is one of the roughest that could be selected. Certainly we are bound to do what we can, to be of use in the world, and not be mere ciphers, or bubbles drifting on the surface of time. My conviction is that the social body is very much like the physical body. Each in healthy environments is robust, and automatically rejects the germs of disease that tend to settle on it. But, then, all situations are not healthy, and where men and women congregate in dense masses, the sanitary and moral conditions are such as to provide a field suitable for the lodgment and spread of the microbes of evil. Do you know what antitoxin is? It consists of microbes that are infused into the veins, enter the arterial blood, and wage therein a war against the poisonous germs. These assist the inherent vital forces in the constitution, which possess enormous recuperative powers, to overmaster the evil.

'It is the same with moral evil in the social body. There are, there must be, myriads of vicious microbes where the moral atmosphere is dank, and the population is crowded unduly close.

'Well, let some of us act as antitoxin

microbes—we are but microbes—but it is these microscopically minute beings that are so powerful for good or for ill. Let us enter the veins of the teeming mass of humanity in our great towns, and fight there against the forces of degradation and death. We may be poor little insignificant creatures in ourselves, but if we be actuated by a right purpose we shall do wonders. The great Master once said that whosoever left houses and lands and family for His sake would receive in this world a hundredfold—fathers and mothers, sisters and brothers—and that promise is fulfilled daily to workers for the good of poor, sick humanity. The results of work reveal themselves and give incalculable happiness. We will talk further of this when we meet. You do not say exactly at what hour you will arrive. So I have not been able to tell Mrs. Wallis at what time to bake and brew for you.—Yours very sincerely,

'MARGARET PAYNE.'

Anne looked from the letter. The driver had drawn up, descended, and stood by the door.

'Beg pardon, miss, but where did you say?'

'Windsor Terrace.'

'Windsor Terrace,' repeated the man; 'never heered of it. Is it somewhere near the cathedrial?'

'Windsor Terrace, Bateman Park,' answered Anne referring to the heading of the letter.

'Bateman Park!' echoed the man, and gave a low whistle. 'Lord! I never thought any of the quality would want to go that way. It's in a werry low part of the town —at t' other end altogether.'

Then he turned the horse's head and drove off at a rapid rate in a direction opposed to that he had previously taken.

'Before long the character of the streets changed, that of the shops and houses deteriorated. They had presented an aspect of comfort and prosperity. The houses had been furnished with majolica receptacles for flowers placed in the windows, and with screens to the lower panes of wavy tinted glass set with bulls' eyes. The doors and windows painted æsthetic colours, olive-green and Indian red; knockers of burnished brass. Tidy maids had been in evidence here and there at the doors, dressed in black, and wearing becoming white caps and aprons.

But now the streets through which Anne

was being driven were of a different complexion.

The dwelling-houses were shabby. Shops multiplied and were of a poor quality; they were crowded together, and displayed no width of frontage—shops of small fruiterers and greengrocers, of cheap furniture-dealers. No more fishmongers displaying salmon and lobsters on white marble slabs; in their place were dealers in bloaters and winkles. Public-houses abounded at street corners. Gin palaces, all gilt and glass and gaslight. A music-hall was passed with a shabby exterior, consisting of a gaping doorway and placards representing comic celebrities in various costumes; a low theatre; small newspaper-dealers from whom penny-dreadfuls might be purchased, and who combined with the sale of literature that of lollipops, unwholesome food for the mind and equally unwholesome for the stomach. Then ensued stalls in the streets; and as the short day had closed in, flaring gas jets were blazing over them illumining the wares exposed—meat chopped into small vendible hunks, bacon in penny rashers, a stall of cheap cutlery, another of flimsy second-hand drapery and remnants, and supposed salvage from a wreck.

The street was fairly full of people. A troop of girls emerged from a factory, with nothing on their heads to cover their uncombed hair, brought down in a fringe over their foreheads, and plied in a dead mass behind, wearing dirty aprons that partly covered shabby gowns, which had been let out in reefs, as the girls grew taller. Some were sucking sweets, all were talking, laughing, gesticulating. Men appeared swarming out of a dockyard or from mills, with faces and hands begrimed to a tint deeper than their canvas suits.

Children abounded, racing after one another, paddling in the gutters, picking up papers that had enveloped toffee, and licking them, throwing carrot-stumps and potato-peelings at passengers. There was a general babel of sounds, of voices of talkers and quarrellers, above which rose those of the vendors shouting their wares, and high above all the tink-tink of a solitary cheap church-bell.

The driver halted and asked his way of a policeman; and Anne could see him indicate the direction, though in the hubbub she could not hear his voice.

The cabman turned out of the main thoroughfare, and in a short while drew up

before a house in a row, the end of which lost itself in a stretch of waste land that was probably Bateman Park; for Anne could distinguish a vast black void, and beyond it the twinkle of a distant row of gas-lamps.

The driver rang the bell, then opened the door of the conveyance, and proceeded to unload the vehicle, with marked diminution of respect for his fare from that he had exhibited when he received Anne at the railway station.

In answer to the summons the house door was opened, and Anne announced herself to a woman in a cap with flying strings who responded to the bell.

'Oh!' said Mrs. Wallis; 'you 're the lady as Miss Payne took the lodgings for. Yes, mem, I didn't know when you 'd be 'ere, but there 's a nice fire burnin' in the parlour.'

Anne paid the cabman, and entered the sitting-room. The nice fire consisted in a smother of coal-dust caked by water thrown over it. Mrs. Wallis proceeded to light one jet of the gas chandelier that depended from the ceiling, and then volunteered to show 'the lady' the bedroom upstairs.

Anne was rejoiced to be able to wash, and to smooth her hair.

'By the way,' said Mrs. Wallis, 'would

you like something to eat? a chop, or ham and eggs and tea? I can get you a chop handy in 'Igh Street'—of course at that dreadful stall with the flapping shoot of gas over it. 'That's one of the conveniences 'ere, miss, we get all we wants 'andy, and in small quantities. Or would you prefer a couple of bloaters?'

Anne gave the order, and proceeded to investigate her bedroom.

It was clean—clean for the quarter of the town; the linen smelt of smoke; there was a tiny grate in which a microscopic fire might be induced to draw out a precarious existence if left untouched by the poker, and put together with a hairpin only.

Above the washhand-stand, furnished with basin and ewer covered with a printed pattern borrowed from a chintz curtain, was a strip of white enamelled canvas, decorated with storks and kingfishers and blue irises, to preserve the penny a yard green wall-paper from being splashed.

Texts on scrolls were flourished about on the wall. There was a mirror above the mantleshelf, but some previous lodger had incautiously put a candle under it and cracked it in one corner. This was draped so as to conceal the blemish.

Anne descended to the sitting-room, where the gas jet was roaring. This she lowered, and lit a second, then poked the fire and asked for some lumps of coal.

On the chimney-piece was a glass globe set on a white marble stand, it contained a minute tree and a man carrying a gun with a dog at his side. The humour of this article consisted in this—if the ball were inverted, a cloud of white particles filled the water in the receptacle, and this gradually settled when the ornament was replaced in its former position, and subsided over the tree, the man, and the dog, and was supposed to represent a snowstorm.

'Oh, dear!' sighed Anne, 'shall I ever be able to endure this sort of place?'

CHAPTER XX

MARGERY PAYNE

ANNE QUILLET had finished her meal, of chops and, notwithstanding what she had said to her stepmother, tea.

'This is very strong,' she had remarked to Mrs. Wallis.

'Strong, miss! I thought you might like it so. I will bring up a jug of hot water.'

But when she tasted the decoction she found that the strength did not correspond with the colour. The tea-leaves must have been dyed, she supposed, to give tint and tone; and although water was brought in, she found that dilution was unnecessary.

She had open before her a volume of *Elegant Extracts from the Poets*; an old bound book of the beginning of the nineteenth century; and she was making a first acquaintance with the compositions of Akenside, Beattie, Parnell, Wharton, and Falconer.

'There is a nice collection of books on the shelf, miss,' her landlady had said; 'most of them prizes my daughter gained at school; she is now a pupil-teacher.'

But the look of these books repelled Anne, and she preferred the older work; yet, as she read, she marvelled at the taste in the eighteenth century, which could relish such stilted stuff.

Then in came Margery Payne.

Margery was dressed in a navy-blue gown, with a jacket over it, white collar, cuffs, and a dark blue hat. She was older than Anne, tall, far from beautiful, with a pale face, illumined by intelligent eyes. Her features were nought, but no one looking at her could say she was plain, so sweet, so restful was her countenance. Her face was like a quiet English landscape, without marked characteristics, but pleasant and soft.

'I will ring for Mrs. Wallis to take away. I am sorry the smell of my chops is in the room,' said Anne. 'There is no fire in the back apartment, and I doubt there being any gas there. Do you mind?'

'Not in the least. Well, how do you like your quarters?—very different from any you have been accustomed to.'

'There is a charm in new experiences,' answered Anne; but she did not think it. However, Margery took no notice of the unreality of the reply, if she had observed it.

'I hope so indeed. If you had told me when to expect you, I would have been at the door to welcome you. We shall see a good deal of each other soon, I trust.'

'That will be delightful,' said Anne, and this time expressed her thoughts.

Anne did not know much of Miss Payne; she had met her when Margery had been staying with mutual friends. Anne, Vic, and Flossie had then pronounced her 'slow,' because she did not talk of dogs, horses, officers, novels, and fashions, and seemed to them inexperienced in such absorbing topics.

'She's not one of our lot,' was the judgment of Vic. 'And I can't think how the Sedgeleys can abide having her with them.'

Nevertheless there had been a something in Margery that had impressed Anne. And when a change had come in her feelings, her mind had turned to Margery as to the only person of her acquaintance who could help her.

Margery had been staying with her cousins to recruit; she had been overworked, so said the Sedgeleys—she had needed rest, they explained apologetically, as pleading an excuse for harbouring, during a fortnight, one who was not to be severely judged, because not devoted to those objects which made up the world of the Sedgeleys.

'I have got the fire at last to burn cheerfully,' said Anne. 'Mrs. Wallis has a frugal mind, and is chary of wasting lumps of coal. You see she did not know at what hour I would arrive, so she husbanded her fuel. Come round by the fire, and we will have some talk. You are not in a hurry?'

'None at all. I have kept the evening free for you. How are all good friends at Guilderston?'

'All well; no marriages or burials since you were there, excepting only my father's escapade. You know that he has given us a stepmother?'

'You told me so in your letter.'

'Take off your hat and jacket and be cosy.'

Mrs. Wallis removed the relics of the supper, and Anne opened the window for five minutes to renovate the atmosphere

within. Then, when she had fastened it, returned to the fire and took her seat on one side of the hearth.

'Yes,' she said, 'my father has gone and done it with a vengeance. It was quite impossible for me to remain at home. There would have been recurrent hurricanes. With the best resolve I could not remain quiescent. Have you ever met the Kewe?'

Margery shook her head.

'She has fingers shaped like bats, broad at the ends, with great flat nails. No woman with fingers so formed can have delicate sensations. I was with her at dinner one night only, and she rubbed me up the wrong way in ten minutes. I sat down to table full of good intentions, and before the fish was done I was in open revolt. This could not continue. For papa's happiness it was necessary that I should leave, and let them rub together till all the points of friction are smoothed. I fancy a second wife is like a set of artificial teeth: for several days it produces great discomfort, till the palate has become hardened, and the gums accustomed to the extraneous structure that has been introduced into the mouth. Papa will feel sore and vexed for a while, and then

will settle down to content. His new wife will keep the servants in order, reduce the expenses of the establishment, look over and check the bills, and that will please papa. Margery, that first evening! it was bad in the dining-room, it was worse in the parlour. She began to play the fond and youthful bride with poor papa. It was all very well for Flossie to be coaxing when she wanted money, but for the Kewe!—I could think only of Æsop's fable of the lap-dog and the ass. Do not think me naughty, but I could not stand that. Even if I had not made arrangements for flitting, that would have driven me away.'

'But what made you think of coming here, of all places?'

Anne was silent for a few moments, looking into the fire, and turning one hand over the other.

'Margery,' she said, 'it was my fault that papa plunged into this Kewe affair. If I had done my duty as his daughter, his eldest, and had studied his happiness and his interests, he would not have married again. He went a-Keweing only because —he told me so himself—he felt we wanted a discreet stepmother over us.'

Margery said nothing to this.

'Papa had just cause to complain,' continued Anne. 'We did not consider his comforts, only our pleasures. The management of the house, which I should have looked to, I let slide, and his finances would not stand that. We did just what we liked, and were under no sort of constraint.'

'But now you are all dispersed.'

'Flossie will be obliged to return. Margery, I trust you will let me speak to you as to a friend. I feel that I am responsible for this marriage. If my father is miserable, it is my fault. If I could have made amends by remaining at home, I would have done so; but that would only aggravate the evil. After all, in time, they may get on together. Papa is an amiable, peace-loving man, happy when he has no money-worries; and when he returns home, if he have a well-dressed and well-served dinner, he will be happy.'

'But are you sure that you know anything about life in the slums?'

'I know nothing. I am come to see what it is like.'

'It is a rough, hard life. I heard something about your having gone into a nursing establishment. Was it so?'

Anne's face became grave.

'Margery,' she said, 'that was another of my delinquencies. I went into it in a light-hearted way, just to free myself from a domestic deadlock at home, and out of a sudden caprice. And I failed.'

'If you had no call, you would fail.'

'I had none whatever. And I was kicked out.'

'That is to say, you left, having found that the place or the work did not suit you.'

'I was turned out. I failed so disgracefully.'

'You were not calculated for the work. Every one has his special gift, and this was not yours.'

'It was not that,' said Anne; 'this is another of the black spots in my story. I have been the ruin of two men—my dear father, whom I have delivered over to that giraffe, the Kewe, and of another. I was given a place of responsibility and I neglected my duty. I shall never, never wipe away the stain of that. O Margery! I cannot now tell you all the particulars, they are too shameful. I spoiled a good man's life by my waywardness. So I have come to hate myself; and all that I desire now is to make some amends for the past. I have a

burning spot in my heart, the fire of which cannot be allayed. Let me have an opportunity of being able to think that I have done some good to some people. It is the only salve to my terrible wound.'

Margery took Anne's hand and caressed it. Anne broke down and sobbed.

'Help me to do this,' she said. 'I feel so guilty; and by this means alone can I receive peace of mind. As to the past, that cannot be undone. Do you understand me?'

Margery nodded. Presently she said, 'I am not sure that you have come to the right place. Work, an infinity of work, there is here to be taken in hand, but we are under a cloud. The bishop is down on St. Giles, and has refused to license a curate to our vicar, and has cut off twenty-five pounds that was paid him by one of the Church societies for necessitous clergy in poor places. By refusing to countersign our vicar's application, it has been lost to him. So he has to struggle on upon a hundred and fifty a year, less rates and taxes. There are no rich people in the slums. The respectabilities of the close draw up their skirts and pass us by on the other side.'

'Well,' said Anne, 'let me see what is

being done here; I shall judge for myself.'

'None can work without an inward call to it.'

'But I do feel a call to work.'

'That may be—but here?'

CHAPTER XXI

ST. GILES

'READY?' asked Margery Payne, looking in at the door next day about half-past eleven. 'I am on duty to-day, but not as cook—come with me to the soup-kitchen.'

'I am ready,' answered Anne, and followed Miss Payne out of the house.

'We take it in turn,' said Margery. 'One day I cook, and another I am waitress.'

'Have you many helpers?'

'Plenty. Some half a dozen ladies by birth, and a score of daughters of tradesmen, ready, cheerful, and reliable. 'One can always trust them if they undertake a task to be at their posts. But we do not require them all for the soup-kitchen. We have other institutions.'

The soup-kitchen was in an old galvanised and corrugated iron shed, and in large blue letters the stamp of the firm had been impressed on the material.

The structure had been erected as a guano store, but had been abandoned for the purpose when the artificial manures had been removed to a more convenient situation near a wharf. Then the disused guano-shed had been converted to its present purpose, for a kitchen supplying food to the abjectly poor during the winter.

The savour of its first contents had not wholly deserted it.

The people were not admitted into the building, save only a few at a time, through a wicket over which a policeman presided.

A stove and boilers had been erected within, and the smoke was conducted into a brick chimney outside.

Already a crowd of hungry, expectant, and needy creatures were assembled without, awaiting the signal to enter through the wicket.

They were a shabby set, with battered hats and rusty coats and patched trousers, with crumpled bonnets and tattered gowns; the men unshaven, the women unwashed; gaunt girls and lanky boys, and some haggard children struggling to force their way to the front.

Anne shrank from contact with them, as

Margery drew her through the crush, and she was relieved when within.

Pleasant-faced young ladies in clean white aprons or pinafores and caps were flying about making preparations for supplying the applicants with what they would require. They looked crisp and fresh in contrast with those to whom they were ministering. They appeared like upright May flowers beside sodden and down-beaten weeds.

Anne noticed a tall girl clearing a passage for another who was blind, and who held a basket. Some of those squeezing forward carried pipkins, others tin cans; some, again, dirty oil-cloth bags, in which their portions were to be received.

The menu consisted of what the people called 'savoury pie,' that is to say, of scraps of meat with onions and potato, baked under a crust; also of suet-pudding, boiled, with currants and a few raisins in it. A slice of the pie was sold for a penny, and one of the pudding for half that sum. Some asked for twopenn'orth of pie, and were content with that. A family of five persons would expend threepence, and the amount purchased, as the helpings were liberal, would feed the entire family. Some

had a pennyworth of pie and a ha'p'orth of pudding, and received their portions crushed together into one bag or pipkin.

Now and then a young man, respectably dressed, and looking like a clerk, glancing about him as ashamed to be seen, offered his can, and received his dinner, which he hastily conveyed into a glazed black bag, and hurried away, with a spot of colour in his cheek. Then a neat girl, like a seamstress, pale and anæmic, also claimed a share.

One of the ladies took the coins from each applicant, and passed on the order; what was called for was brought by another; after that, the purchaser withdrew to consume the food at home, or on the doorstep of an adjoining house.

Anne stood back against the galvanised iron wall, near a window, and could hear what passed without. Some of the crowd were comparing the menu of that day with the dishes furnished on the previous day, and were expressing their preference for this or for that. It seemed that a certain variety was provided on the various days of the week. Some were discussing an atrocious murder that filled several columns of the papers they read. Two old women

in tatters were disputing over the last Paris fashion in hats.

When every one had been supplied, and the utensils had been scoured that had been employed in the cooking, then Margery said, 'I am not going to let you off yet. You must see our work-shops,' and she led Anne away from the shed.

'Our difficulty in this place is,' she went on, 'that there is ample employment for the men at the docks, in the warehouses, and they earn respectable wages; but for the girls there is nothing but a boot-factory, so that they are idle, lazy, are to be seen drifting about the street, principally at night, and getting into evil ways.'

'Why should they not go into service?'

'They are unqualified for domestic service. They have been allowed from children to do as they liked, go where they chose. If sent into a gentleman's house, they would kick at the restraint. They have no sense of order. What little they do is done in a slovenly manner; at their homes they learn nothing, neither neatness nor obedience.'

'What, then, can you do for them?'

'You shall see. A considerable percent-

age of the fathers drink, and the mothers have to bring up their families on a small sum. Sometimes the mothers also lift the elbow, and then the misery is supreme. Now, what our vicar has done has been to start workshops for the girls and young women, where they may earn a fair wage with their needles and fingers. In fact they receive what sum that sells for which they make, after deducting the cost of the material. They come or they go as they list, but little by little, the satisfaction of being able to earn a substantial sum makes them eager to remain steady at their work, and teaches them diligence and system. Some ladies negotiate the sales, some manage the accounts. One or two are always present to talk or read to the young women in working hours. Then our vicar has struck out a new idea for the younger girls, the making of shell-boxes and ornaments; that is to say, card-frames of boxes and the like which are coated with a compost, and then various coloured shells are set in this thickly, and really pretty little articles are turned out that sell at seaside places. Some children cut the cardboard into the requisite shapes, others fold, and others again decorate them, and

if the demand grew we could employ more children, at the age when they are leaving the Board Schools, and are thrown wild on the streets. Some take to the shell-work and others to the needle.'

When Margery had conducted Anne through the workshops, the two returned home.

'I shall be back for you at half-past seven this evening,' she said. 'Then you must make acquaintance with our girls' club.'

At the appointed hour Margery called. Anne was reading.

By this time the streets that had been deserted during the day, exhibiting but a sluggish life, had quickened into vigorous existence. People swept up and down the main thoroughfare, and the ugliness and meanness of the shops were disguised by the glare of the gas.

'Here we are,' said Margery. 'Take care—up a narrow flight of stairs. That long lighted room above, whence you hear the twang of a piano is our club premises.'

Margery led the way up the steep ascent, followed by Anne. The staircase was badly lighted and dirty, for the

streets were muddy—not with the wholesome mud of country lanes, but with the slime of a town slum, and the feet of those ascending had brought much in and had deposited it on the steps.

The long room was well lighted with unprotected gas jets. It was bare of curtains and unpapered, but oleographs hung on the walls, mostly pictures from the Christmas numbers of the *Graphic* and *Illustrated London News*.

A considerable number of girls were present, some wearing hats, several with bare heads, but with shawls slung over their shoulders, that could be drawn up to serve as head covering when required.

Some girls were seated before the fire, talking and laughing boisterously, some were mending bits of garments that were torn. Some played games, and others danced at the end of the room where was the piano. Anne walked to that extremity, to offer her services in the event of the player being tired, and noticed the blind girl whom she had seen at the soup-kitchen. She was seated in a corner with her hands on her lap, by herself, listening to the music.

'Can I assist?' asked Anne of the

pianist, a young lady to whom she had been introduced previously by Margery.

'You are very good. Can you sing?'

'Yes—after a fashion.'

'Then do give us a song whilst the girls rest and recover their breath.'

'I will do what I can. Will you have something by Randegger, Roeckel, or Tosti?'

'Whatever you like.'

Then Anne considered a moment, and sang something by Woronsky. Before she had finished she became aware that she had not produced a marked effect. She was thanked when the piece was concluded, and the lasses applauded, but without enthusiasm, rather out of good nature. Margery went up to her, and stooping, said, 'I have heard you sing "Sally in our Alley."'

'Oh!—that!'

Anne struck the chords and commenced. A hush fell on the room, all the girls left their work or play, or broke off their conversation to crowd up at the end of the room where was the piano. As she proceeded, their eyes sparkled and their bosoms heaved. When she had done, she looked about her, and saw delight in every face.

'O miss! ain't that awful jolly!' said one.

'Reg'lar stunnin',' remarked another.

'Can you give us a second of this sort?' asked Margery.

Anne shook her head; alas! it was the sole old English song that she knew.

Then in came the vicar, as Anne guessed, and was greeted by all present with affection and respect.

'Let us have a jolly good rowdy game, sir! Do, sir!' the wenches pleaded, dancing round him.

'All right!—but I must have a word first with Tom-Tom.'

Then he strode up the room to the blind girl, whom his quick eye had discerned, and he took a seat beside her. Her face cleared, and a smile broke out upon it as she heard his voice.

What he said to her, and what she answered, Anne did not know, for she was beyond earshot. After ten minutes he rose. 'Now, lasses! let us have Courtgrab. Where are the cards?'

A ring was formed about a large round table for this harmless but noisy game.

The vicar did not remain above half an hour; but before he left Anne said to

her friend, 'I should like to have a word with him whenever convenient.'

Margery transmitted the request.

'Very well,' said the vicar; 'come and have supper—nine precise—both of you. I am off to the boys' club, and I have to be at church after that.'

CHAPTER XXII

THE VICARAGE

'HERE we are,' said Margery.

They stood before a house in a side street leading out of the main thoroughfare, the artery of traffic and seat of business. It bore none of the appearance of a gentleman's residence. It had been, in fact, a coach-builder's shop that had been converted into a parsonage.

Without knocking, Margery entered with her friend,—the house-door was free to all—and tapped at a side door opening out of the passage. In answer to a loud call to enter, she conducted her friend into the dining-room contrived out of the coach-builder's shop.

The shutters had been put up, and fastened by bars screwed across, and a window had been inserted, but over this a red blind was drawn. A plain iron tube with branches depended from the ceiling,

and formed the chandelier illumining the room.

A good fire burned in the grate. Some sacred pictures adorned the unpapered walls.

The vicar in his cassock was there standing by the fire talking to three young men who had been assistants in the boys' club and brigade, and whom he had asked in to supper, as they lived at a distance up town. One was an Oxford man, another an accountant in a dry goods warehouse, the third was a ship-carpenter. They were all laughing and talking on the most friendly terms.

The vicar came forward and welcomed the two young ladies, and introduced Anne. With Margery the parish workers were well acquainted, and they shook hands with her.

'Come along,' said the parson. 'To the food!—all is on table; we have been waiting only for the ladies to grace our meal.'

A coarse linen cloth, such as is usually employed in kitchens, covered the table, on which stood a leg of mutton cold, that had been cut into for the early dinner, a pot of onion pickle, some hot boiled potatoes, and a jug of ale.

Grace was said, and all sat down to the meal.

With a sigh, Anne recalled what she had ordered for her own supper—a little fish, a roast chicken with two vegetables, and a marmalade pudding; but on receiving the invitation to the vicarage she had countermanded the order.

She looked at the fare somewhat blankly. The meat might not be very inviting, but she consoled herself with the assurance that something better was to follow, for she smelt a savour of Welsh rarebit, and that was a dish of which she was particularly fond.

She now ate the slab of cold mutton passed to her, and a potato.

That course ended, the carpenter stood up, removed the dishes and changed the plates, then produced an American cheese from the sideboard, and proceeded to cut hunks of bread.

'If there had been any pudding left over at the soup-kitchen, I would have had five pennyworth,' said the vicar. 'I sent the housekeeper for some, but it was in request, and all gone.'

'How odd!' thought Anne, 'cold cheese first, and Welsh rarebit after it! I will

reserve myself for the latter. I wish I had not countermanded my chicken and fish.'

However, no toasted cheese arrived.

'Just like our servants,' thought Anne; 'they have let the master and his guests have the cold American, and have some over the fire for themselves with pepper and butter.'

She found that the conversation at table turned on parochial matters, and the men told little stories about their classes, or brigades, that were amusing, but without much point. They seemed to be excellent friends, although belonging to very different classes, and occupying different positions. The vicar talked to Margery and her, off and on, and then to his male guests.

With advantage, considered Anne, he might have worn a clean collar.

Presently he stood up, repeated grace, and then, turning to her, said: 'I am at your service, Miss Quillet. Will you step into my study? I will lead the way.'

He conducted her into what had been the coach-builder's office, at the back, with its walls now lined with books. The window looked into a narrow backyard, against a factory wall. The vicar pulled down the blind which the housekeeper had

neglected; and he lighted the gas, which was another of her omissions. Then he took a chair, made her seat herself in a cane armchair, and said: 'Now, then, Miss Quillet, what do you want?'

Anne was unaccustomed to such bluntly direct questions; however, she met the parson in his own fashion and replied, 'I want advice.'

'About what?'

'Myself—how to recover my self-respect and ease of mind. I have forfeited both by neglect of plain duties, with the result that I have made two men miserable beside myself. I was set to nurse one who was ill, and I proved false to my trust, with the most disastrous consequences to the patient. At home, my father expected me to attend to the household, and I did not; so he has married a most unsuitable woman, whose fingers are shaped like paddles.'

'Never mind about her fingers,' said the vicar with a grave smile. 'Was it wholly due to your failure to fulfil your duties that your father married?'

'I take it so. He married a finishing governess to bring us three girls into order. Fancy being dibbled over daily with a pin, as a photographer treats a likeness, till he

has effaced all characteristics, and reduced the whole to the semblance of a wax mask. That is what the new Mrs. Quillet would do with us. But we will not endure it. I cannot live at home, and I must go somewhere where I can do something to efface my self-reproach.'

'And you came here in quest of work?'

'I had some such thought.'

'Well, Miss Quillet,' said the vicar. 'Mark me! I do not say that this is the place where you will find that sphere of work for which you will be best suited. God knows, there is plenty to be done here, and that we need twenty helpers to every one that offers. We want assistants, not of one kind, but animated by one spirit. This is a dirty place.'

'I see it is,' acquiesced Anne, 'moreover'—she suspected that she had contracted something undesirable from contact with the girls in the club—'I feel that it is so.'

'It is of no use your coming here unless you can love both the place and the people.'

'Love them!' repeated Anne, with a sinking at the heart.

'Yes,' said he; 'ask Miss Payne, ask Miss Swanborough, ask my Oxford Uni-

versity friend in the other room—all will tell you the same. Consider that young man. He is a gentleman of good family, and accustomed to his creature comforts. Yet he is never so happy as when down here in the slums. I was in a bad way last year: I contracted a sort of fever, and it was near "gone coon" with me. But devoted and faithful nurses pulled me through.' Anne winced.

'And when convalescent,' proceeded the vicar, 'I was packed off to the Yorkshire Moors to recruit. Pure and exhilarating air, lovely scenery, healthy sweeps of open ground, Gordale Scar, Malham Tarn, Kilnsea Crags, Fountains Abbey, and all that—but I had ever a pang at heart, and I had no rest till I was back again among my own dear people, and snuffed once more the fumes of soap-boiling. Do you smell them?'

'Oh!' said Anne, 'I thought it was Welsh rarebit.'

'We adjoin a soap manufactory, and when the wind sets our way we are enveloped in the atmosphere of melted tallow. We get to like it. Do you happen to know Gerome's picture of the Gladiators? One has cast his opponent on the ground, and,

with uplifted sword, looks round on the thousands of spectators to see what is their verdict, life or death for the vanquished. Nero is lounging in the imperial box, eating a peach. He turns his eyes to note that the multitude with down-pressed thumbs give the signal for death, and he finishes his peach. Miss Quillet, you have descended into the arena, this blood- and dirt-stained slum—one among the thousand slums of civilised Europe—in which the death-struggle of the masses is being waged. You cannot go back to your reserved seat and soft cushions and finish your peach. Do you understand me?'

'Yes'; she spoke hesitatingly, and her face was troubled. The vicar's eyes were on her, searching her soul's depths.

'Those bloody spectacles of the ancient world were not abolished in Christian times by the denunciation of bishops, or by Christian emperors withholding their countenance, but by a poor monk, who threw himself over the barriers to part the combatants, and who was stoned to death by the indignant spectators for spoiling their sensational sport. We are ready to give our lives, and we do give them—to alleviate the misery we find, and we do not get stones

hurled at us, only plenty of dirt. Now, mark me.' His voice became intense. 'You must feel an inward fire that impels you to join us. If you do, then over the barriers with you, and we will hold out to you our soiled hands.'

Anne looked down on the floor in deep thought.

'Stay here,' continued the vicar, 'for a few days and consider. If the fire be not kindled, go your ways. You are in earnest. Where there is a will, there is a way. It requires very special gifts for work in such places as this, and all are not qualified for it. But never fear. You have taken the right step. You have thrown aside your peach. Mark my words. The way will open before you whither you are to go —and the door will be shut behind you.'

He was interrupted by a ragged urchin who burst in, with—'Pass'n! you 're wanted. There 's a man been run over with a cart and is bad hurt. Come at once!'

Instantly the vicar sprang from his chair and was gone, without his hat, without a word of apology to Anne, who remained for a few moments alone, deep in thought; then she slowly rose and went into the dining-room and rejoined Margery.

As the two young ladies walked together to Windsor Terrace, Anne was silent.

Suddenly she roused and said, 'Why did the vicar call that blind girl Tom-Tom?'

'Because her name is Thomasine Thomas.'

'Thomasine Thomas?'

Anne stood still.

'Her father was, I am told, a porter, killed in an accident on the railway. She is here, living with a drunken, disreputable aunt.'

It was to Anne as though a streak of light shone before her.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE PALACE

NEXT morning a note arrived by post for Anne :—

'My dearest Sister,—Fancy! we are both in the same town. I am staying at the Palace with Susie Meade, the Bishop's youngest daughter, my school friend. She is an awfully jolly girl. As soon as your letter was forwarded to me, I told Mrs. Meade that you were here, and she begs that you will come to the Palace to lunch to-morrow at 1.30, punctually. Do come, there's a darling, and tell me all about papa and his spousie. I shall expect you, as a matter of course.—Your loving sister,

'Flossie.'

Accordingly, Anne gave no orders for her lunch, but directions for the chicken and mashed potatoes and the marmalade pudding for her dinner.

She started in good time, took a cab, and

arrived at the Palace ten minutes before the lunch hour. She was met with effusion by her warm-hearted sister, and was introduced to the bishop's wife and daughters. His lordship was engaged in his study, but would appear at table.

Flossie had two minutes with Anne, after Mrs. Meade had asked her to divest herself of hat and mantle. As she removed these in the hall, Flossie inquired: 'Why, dear, what do you mean? You said in your note that you were going to find some good work to do. But why?'

'I must do something.'

'But wherefore? You have enough to live on—and lend me a trifle when under water to buoy me up. They don't pay for charitable works.'

Anne knew that it was futile to attempt to explain her motive to her sister, and both returned to the drawing-room.

When the gong sounded, the bishop, accompanied by his chaplain, a mild, obsequious clergyman who, as Flossie hinted aside, aspired to the hand of one of the bishop's daughters, by many years his senior, and to be rewarded with a good living; and by an honorary canon, the incumbent of a fashionable church in the

town. The latter was a man with a florid face, white hair, and wearing whiskers, and with a set smile whenever he addressed the bishop or listened to his words.

Mrs. Meade introduced Anne, and his lordship said some kind words to her. 'So I am informed by your sister that you are looking out for some good work. Can I help you to it?'

Anne brightened: 'O my lord! you are very good. If I may ask your assistance?'

'Most assuredly. I can spare you ten minutes after lunch, then we can talk the matter over. It is a great comfort to find young ladies animated with such admirable sentiments.'

'Indeed it is, my lord,' amened the honorary canon, and he smiled approvingly on Anne, after a preliminary smile, addressed to the prelate.

'I cannot spare you much time,' said the bishop. 'I have to take a constitutional afterwards; and my good friend, Canon Stallard, is kind enough to accompany me.'

The white-haired cleric rubbed his hands, smiled effusively, and said, 'It is so good of your lordship to say so. But, really, the

honour and pleasure and goodness is all on your side.'

'Now, ladies!' exclaimed the bishop. 'Mother! lead the way.'

The footman, in episcopal purple and with white stockings, held the door. The butler, with clerical gravity, stood in the dining-room, that was hung round with portraits of the bishops since the Restoration. Anne was placed beside his lordship, who was very gracious. He was a kindly man, eminently courteous. The honorary canon, who sat by Mrs. Meade, would not, however, leave him to himself, and although he spoke to his hostess now and then, made repeated attempts to draw the bishop into conversation with himself, although separated from him by the length of the table.

'My lord, how admirably you put that point in your charge,' he said; 'that about obedience to episcopal opinions—decisions, I mean. It could not have been more conclusive. I took a pencil and laboured to express the same thing in various ways, but every attempt proved paltry, nothing else would do. You had got hold of the right words, and delivered your sense with marvellous trenchancy.'

'I believe I said what all right-minded men think,' answered the bishop; then, 'Miss Quillet, you will take some sherry?'

Presently the canon engaged the prelate upon some diocesan topic of merely technical and local interest. The bishop kindled to the theme, and Anne, who understood nothing about it, looked at the portraits on the walls.

Those of the Caroline bishops had their special stamp. The prelates were moustached, and looked like men who might have worn harness like cavaliers as appropriately as rochet and lawn. Those of the Georgian period were courtiers every inch, somewhat full of blood. It was striking how every epoch produced its special type of face. Then came the occupants of the see in the nineteenth century, amiable, smug prelates, men who could not be blown about by any wind of false doctrine, but who would be swayed by every breath of popular opinion. Good, well-intentioned men, without force of character, and dominating wills. Anne wondered whether any one of them had ever been in a slum. She knew by the look of their faces that they would have been helpless and useless if by any fatality set in one.

When lunch was ended, Mrs. Meade rose.

'One moment, Miss Quillet,' said the bishop; 'just a word with Canon Stallard in my study, and I will return to you here, where we shall not be disturbed, as the servants are at their dinner.'

The room was cleared, and Anne was left alone.

She had partaken of a neat, well-cooked lunch. On the sideboard was a row of menu porcelain cards, embossed with the mitre and the arms of the see. She took up one. It bore, uneffaced, the order of the dishes for the dinner on the previous evening. She read this :—

'Soupe claire.
'Turbot and oyster sauce.
'Coquilles au Saint Jacques.
'Veal cutlets.
'Quenelles.
'Boiled mutton.
'Roast turkey.
'Woodcock.
'Sir Watkin Wynne's pudding.
'Almond pudding.
'Meringues.
'Green butter and cheese soufflé.'

The bishop came in.

'Well, Miss Quillet,' said he cheerily, 'I am sorry to have kept you waiting. I am so charmed to understand that you want to devote yourself to useful works in our beloved Church. Have you any partiality for a particular branch of utility?'

'No, my lord. I am at a loss what line to adopt.'

'Why not undertake a secretaryship—of course unsalaried—to one of our charitable or missionary institutions? A secretaryship, to my mind, is just that for which you, with your education, are calculated.'

Anne was unconvinced. The idea did not commend itself to her mind. The bishop saw this, and went on: 'Then there is the Girls' Friendly Society; you might do excellent work in finding situations for young domestic servants in Christian households.'

'But how should I find out such households, my lord?'

'You would have to institute investigations before recommending.'

'Would not that be a little inquisitorial, and might be resented?' demurred Anne.

'Or, again,' proceeded the bishop, 'you might well collect money for church building, or assist in providing curates for poor

parishes. An excellent plan is to send out batches of cards to all your friends, and ask them to fill in with shillings, and return when completed. You might dispose of, say, ten such collecting-cards to each of ten acquaintances, and desire each to distribute ten among their several friends. When all the hundred have been returned to you, each containing ten shilling subscriptions, you would have raised fifty pounds, a goodly total.'

'I am a poor hand at begging,' said Anne in a despondent tone.

'Then there are Sunday-schools.'

'But one must know something of doctrine before teaching.'

'Not at all; if you confine yourself to Bible geography or history.'

'I do not even know where is the Brook Jabbok.'

Anne was unconvinced. The pile as of dead sticks and dry fern might be laid, but the fire had not fallen to ignite it.

'For all that, I feel sure, a secretaryship is the right thing for you. Or, why not church embroidery? By the way, where are you staying at present?'

'At Saint Giles; seeing the work carried on there.'

'Saint Giles!'

The bishop's face altered, and he shook his head. 'I entirely disapprove of the proceedings at Saint Giles. I am sorry to say, I have been obliged to express my strong displeasure—'

'By refusing a curate.'

'Well,' the bishop coloured slightly; 'one has to take measures that are to be deplored, of an exceptional nature, with such clergy as are recalcitrant. A noble lady has been holding a largely attended meeting in this city, agitating on this particular matter; she was on the platform supported by his lordship.'

'Supported — why supported? Surely she wasn't—'

'I mean backed up, seconded.'

'Oh, I see. When two men ride a horse, one must ride behind.'

'Quite so.' The bishop was impatient of interruption, and when interrupted, did not pay attention to what was said. He continued: 'It was a largely attended meeting, and the press took the matter up, and I felt called upon to interfere. Her ladyship and his lordship did me the honour of dining with me last night. In our beloved Church, we must avoid all

extremes, in one direction as in the other.'

'Does not that imply standing still?' asked Anne.

'No. I may have expressed myself without sufficient clearness,' said the bishop. 'Thanks, Miss Quillet, for your correction.' But his face did not express gratification, but bore a puzzled look. He went on, 'I, as bishop, have to keep a mean, to be neither too much one thing, nor too much the other, not to lean to one side or to the other. I have with one breath to rebuke the unduly high, and with the next to remonstrate with the unduly low.'

'Like the traveller in the satyr's cave?' asked Anne.

The bishop was so much accustomed to be agreed with, that he was not readily susceptible to such shafts as shot from Anne's lips. He did not give himself time or trouble to consider what she said, but went on, 'Quite so, quite so! the *via media* is the way I have to pursue, not to press unduly to one side or to the other.'

'Is a session between two stools, my lord, either secure or decorous?'

Now for the first time did it penetrate to the bishop's mind that Anne was not in

accord with all he said. His face became cold and hard. He looked at his watch.

'I am sorry, Miss Quillet, that I must leave; I am due for a walk with Canon Stallard. A secretaryship is the thing for you.'

He bowed stiffly, and turned on his heel.

CHAPTER XXIV

TOM-TOM

'BOTHERATION!' said Anne to herself, as she walked from the Palace to Windsor Terrace. 'I did not intend to be rude to the bishop, any more than I purposed being sharp with my stepmother. I wish I possessed more self-control. I cannot restrain my tongue, if anything rasps my temper.

'It was that menu-card upset me, when I contrasted those people dining in purple and fine linen, with the vicar and ourselves eating our cold mutton and cheese; and the bishop with his four thousand a year, cuts off five-and-twenty pounds from reaching the poor parson who has but a hundred and fifty, because he will not amble in pair along the primrose path, Via Media, with that smug honorary canon! Well! this is a funny world, but a sad one, nevertheless!'

She walked quickly; she was hot.

She felt a sense of relief when she had

passed out of the self-satisfied, prim upper town, that hung upon the skirts of the Cathedral close, and descended towards the slums. It was like passing out of what was hollow into realities, and these were better than emptiness, even if they were tragic.

But as she got further along the main street that led from Jerusalem to Jericho, she noticed a band of dirty and noisy girls linked together, yelling out a coarse music-hall song of the most objectionable character, full of foul *double-entendres*. It made her blood curdle; and she recoiled at this revelation of the moral filth of the slums. Hitherto she had been brought in contact only with that which was material.

She slunk from the road into a doorway that was open, so as to let this drift pass by; but as she did so, she noticed a girl with fair hair, carrying a bottle, and groping her way unconcernedly along. The band of bacchanals also saw the child, enveloped her, caught her, slung her about, forced her into their chain, and proceeded to sweep her along with them, shouting as they did so, 'Come along, Tom-Tom!' and they recommenced their revolting song.

A sudden wrath burst forth in the heart

of Anne, and she rushed forward into the midst of the street, from her hiding-place, dashed among the wenches, wrenched the child from them, and cried: 'For shame! you wicked girls, for shame! Leave Tom-Tom alone. She shall not be corrupted by you.'

The chain broke, and the links fell into groups. The girls were startled by the intervention of Anne.

Before they could rally, Anne, palpitating with indignation, drew Tom-Tom from among the squalid gang, clutching her by one hand, whilst the girl clasped the bottle to her bosom with the other, regardless of the shouts of derision and insult which rose and pursued her. She did not let go till she had reached the side street that led to Windsor Terrace.

Then only did she halt, and draw a long breath.

'Tom-Tom!' she said, 'tell me, do you come from Westport?'

'Yes, ma'am.'

'Was your father a porter at the station there?'

'Yes, ma'am.' The girl knew by the voice that she was addressed by a lady.

'Thomasine, I knew him. He asked me

to look after you; and, so help me God, I will do so!'

Anne glanced up at the darkening sky, where a star was twinkling. 'The way—the way is opening before me,' she said.

She paused for a moment or two, still holding the child's hand, so as to gain her breath.

'Please, ma'am, I must go to aunt. She sent me for the bottle of gin to the "Crown and Anchor."'

'Your aunt? where does she live?'

'Close by. But I don't know, neither, where I be just now. She is in Bloater Buildings.'

'You come with me. You shall go to my house, and stay there till I have seen your aunt. Give me the bottle; I will take it to her. What is her name?'

'Mrs. Browne.'

'At what number?'

'16 Bloater Buildings.'

Anne conducted the young girl to her lodgings, and intrusted her to Mrs. Wallis, with instructions that she should be given tea. Anne promised shortly to return.

Then she started forth in quest of Mrs. Browne.

The Buildings were hard by, and the

number was soon picked out. The house was shabby, a window broken, and patched with paper. The door that had been painted dark green was blistered and the paint scaled off. The knocker was so corroded with rust as to be useless. There was no bell. Anne struck with the handle of her umbrella, and presently a stout woman appeared, and stood agape at the sight of a lady carrying her bottle of gin.

'I have come, Mrs. Browne,' said Anne, 'in place of Thomasine, who is taking tea at my lodgings. May I have a word with you? I knew her father.'

'Come in, and welcome, miss. Take a cheer, miss. If you'll please to excuge, I haven't tidied up as yet, and we're in a bit of a rummage.'

'Thank you,' replied Anne, stepping into a foul den, with a corresponding atmosphere. The apartment was littered with broken chairs, clothing, pots and pans, all dirty; at one extremity was a bed that had not been made since it had been abandoned in the morning. The sheets that hung down and lay in part on the floor were dirty, and had been trodden on. A bit of meat and some pealed potatoes, as well as a cracked cup stood on the greasy table.

'I will not sit down, thank you,' said Anne, who had looked at the chairs, and doubted if one were sound; then glancing at the table, asked, 'I may set the bottle for you somewhere?'

'Thank you, miss, proud to oblige you. I 'll take it from you, please. I 've got a chill and the colliwobbles in my in'erds, miss, and am ordered it. But, indeed, I 'm a water-drinker, and have took the pledge. I never touches spirits but when forced to it.'

Mrs. Browne groaned. 'It 's them colliwobbles as is the killin' of me. You 'll excuge me, miss, if I just take a sip for the stayin' of my stomick.'

'I am come,' said Anne, 'to speak to you concerning Thomasine. I knew her father at Westport.'

'Well now—O my vitals and in'erds!—to think of you, miss, 'avin' known 'im. He wor a good man, and is greatly missed. It 's 'ard on me, a poor lone widder woman, to 'ave to maintain his child, and her blind, and me labourin' under them colliwobbles. And so you knowed Thomas? Well, to be sure! and 'ave come to give me a little 'elp to support the poor child. Her keep comes orful expensive, and she do eat like a porpus. And me 'ardly able to earn

enough to keep myself alive and respectable.'

'Mrs. Browne,' said Anne, 'I may be able to assist you.'

'Oh, thanky', miss, the smallest contribution will be gratefully accepted. Her clothin' comes simply ruinous on me, and my old dresses can't be got to fit her noways.'

'Mrs. Browne, the last word Thomasine's father said to me was to ask me to see to his child.'—A stretch of the truth here—he had only desired Anne to see her, to look at her eyes.

'Well, now,' answered the woman, 'to think of that, and his never mentioning it to me!'

'You did not live at Westport.'

'No, I've been 'ere since my 'usband died—five years agone.'

'And my acquaintance with Thomas was shortly before his death. I was present, in fact, when it took place. I saw him lifted from the lines on to the platform. He never spoke after that. But the words he said to me were uttered only a minute or two before the accident.'

'Well, miss, I shall be glad of your assistance. She's a terrible expensive charge, and is ruining of me.'

'I wish, Mrs. Browne, to take her from you, and myself to provide for her.'

'Dear, dear, miss!—oh, my in'erds!—You 'll excuse me, miss, if I take just a spoonful to pull myself together again.'

Mrs. Browne wiped her eyes. 'I have that loved Thomasine,' she said; 'she's been to me the apple of my eye and the darlin' of my 'eart. And to think of losing 'er!'

'To tell you frankly my opinion, Mrs. Browne,' said Anne, 'this is no place for such as she. I rescued her from a rabble of bold girls, who swung her about, and were dragging her along with them, whilst singing a most disgusting song.'

'Dear, dear!' exclaimed the aunt: 'and what a mussy the bottle wasn't broke.'

'I delivered her from their hands,' said Anne.

'And saved the bottle. I 'm sure, miss, we ain't sufficient thankful, are we, miss, in the midst of so many mussies?'

'Mrs. Browne, will you let me have Thomasine?'

The aunt mused.

'Well, now,' said she; 'it 'll be a great inconvenience to me to be without her. I 've no one else to 'elp me to keep the 'ouse

clean, and attend to my wants, and run my arrents. I 'm sometimes took with the colli-wobbles in the night. I 'd 'ave to engage a gal to take 'er place.' She rubbed her nose : 'Then, miss, there 's somethin' comes in from the Railway Orphings' Fund, paid quarterly ; and I can't afford to be deprived of that.'

'You need not—keep it.'

'Then I 've applied to the parish for relief—me a widder-woman, of no occupation to speak of, and she an orphing. The Board of Gardgings will allow a little.'

'You will keep your own allowance.'

'But that for the child—it 's 'arf-a-crown. It ain't much, but it 'elps on.'

'Come then, Mrs. Browne. Take or refuse my offer. Let me retain the child, and you shall keep what the Railway Fund allows for orphans. I will pay you in addition half-a-crown a week so long as you keep away from Thomasine. Give her to me, and her connection with you ceases.'

'It 's 'ard on one's fillin's,' said the aunt weeping. 'It 's for the child's good, I dare say, but it 's cruel on the venerable aunt, as has tried 'er best to bring her up respectable, and show 'er the way she ort to go.'

'What! to the Crown and Anchor?'

'Come,' said Mrs. Browne abruptly; 'pay me a fortnight in advance.'

'There are five shillings. Good-bye, Mrs. Browne; I leave you to your bottle and your "fillin's."'

When Anne returned to No. 4 Windsor Terrace: 'Mrs. Wallis,' she said, 'where are the Public Baths? I am going to take Tom-Tom to them. Meanwhile, make up the bed in the little room. I shall have her wholly re-clothed. From henceforth she belongs to me.'

CHAPTER XXV

I WONDER

THREE evenings after that Anne Quillet had taken Tom-Tom under her charge, she was sitting by the fire. The gas had not been lighted, there was no need for it, as Anne was neither engaged in reading nor on needlework.

The fire cast a ruddy glow through the room, and illumined Anne's face as she sat steeped in thought, and that of Thomasine who occupied a stool at her feet, and rested her head on Anne's knee, supremely happy when her patroness laid a hand on her head and kept it there.

Flossie had not been to see her sister, but had sent an apology by post :—

'The Palace.

'DEAREST ANNE,—I am awfully sorry not to be able to go to you. Constance and Susie Meade were to have accompanied me, but the bishop and Mrs. Meade would not

let them. They say that diphtheria is raging in St. Giles, and they do not wish their daughters to be exposed to infection by visiting so unhealthy a locality. I saw that they did not relish the notion of my going either, and I was compelled to relinquish my purpose. Don't think that I had any fears, not I! It is no fault of mine. Dear Anne, indeed, indeed it is not; but when one is a guest, one is compelled to submit to the feelings of one's hosts.'

'Ah! she has learned that she cannot always have her own way,' said Anne, when she had read the letter. 'That is something for Flossie to acquire. She's a good-hearted girl, I know, but she needs to learn when to yield.'

And now Anne sat looking into the fire, and as she did so, it occurred to her how much she had got into the way of doing this, and how different it was with her now to what it was at Westport. Then a study of the coals had been intolerable. She had seen nothing in the cinders. Now it was a book full of fiery characters, a world full of shapes.

'Tom-Tom,' said she, 'are you wholly blind?'

'I can see a little, miss,' answered the

girl. 'I can see the light of the fire—like the sun through a poppy-leaf. And when you put your hand between it and me I can see the shadow. I know quite well when it is daylight.'

'And can you distinguish people in the street?'

'I can see figures, but not make out who or what they are. Like the man in the Gospel, I see men as trees walking. I am so glad it is not quite dark with me. When the spring comes, and I can sit in the sun, I shall be so happy. But I am happy now, very happy, sitting by you, miss.'

Silence again ensued, and Anne resumed her train of thought. She was considering whether she could find work at St. Giles to which she would be suited. She had been shown a great deal more than she had seen on her first round with Margery. She had been introduced to a night refuge, to a mothers' meeting, to classes for religious instruction, to guilds for girls. She had been taken into squalid houses, and had seen several families congregated in one tenement, a family in each room. In one, a cobbler working by the window, whilst his wife cooked a rasher at the fire, and children rolled and screamed and squabbled on the dirty floor. She had been introduced to

a chamber without a chimney, of which the window had not been opened for weeks, and in which lay a man dying, to whom the vicar was ministering, whilst the poor fellow's wife, with a new-born babe, lay in another bed. She had been constrained to go to the nearest chemist for a bottle of smelling-salts, and to rinse out her mouth with vinegar, and to change her dress to rid the folds of the clinging fetor. Could she accommodate herself to work in such an atmosphere, amidst such surroundings? She was hampered by her early associations, by her nervous temperament, by her æsthetic sense. Margery Payne was as well-bred as herself, but possibly was not so finely strung. She could sympathise with the work, and that cordially. What a work it was! A war engaged against the destructive forces of evil, moral and social, degrading humanity to a condition baser than that of the beasts. All honour to such as fought in it. But had she the qualities calculated to make her one in the ranks of the regenerative microbes?

She knew nothing of the habits of mind, the feelings, the prejudices of the inhabitants of the slums. She did not understand the people, and they would scarcely understand her. She saw clearly that unless

she could get into touch with them, she would be of as little use among them as would be one of those smooth prelates who hung on the dining-room walls in the Palace.

Then, again, with regard to those with whom she would be associated. She was not sure that she could be at one with them. She had marvelled at the way in which the Christ Church man, the ship-carpenter, the vicar, and the accountant had fraternised. She had made the acquaintance of Miss Swanborough, with whom Margery Payne was on the best terms, and in closest relations. This girl was thoroughly good and earnest; she was the daughter of a fruiterer from London, who had moved to this town, and being a man of capacity and energy had set up a jam factory, and was doing a large business. His daughter had brought with her the cockney dialect, and said *sow* for *so*, and complained how heavy the *rine* was during a shower. Anne was conscious of frost-flowers forming over her heart when Miss Swanborough talked to her. She could never accustom herself to be cordial with a person, however she might respect her, who mispronounced her words. The dialect jarred on her nerves, it offended her ear, it repelled her. Anne was aware that

this was absurd, unjust, and unreasonable. Nevertheless the prejudice was too deep rooted in her to be overcome. It was part of her nature.

And her mind next turned to the girls' club, and to whether it ever would be possible for her to so relax as to play with these half-wild beings.

Then Tom-Tom broke forth in song :—

'Of all the girls that are so sweet,
There's none like our Sally;
She is the darling of my heart,
And lives in our alley.'

'Tom-Tom!' exclaimed Anne, 'what makes you sing that?'

'Please, miss, your fingers were drumming it on my forehead.'

'Tom, you have a nice voice. If we remain here I will get a piano. I dare say you can be taught to play, and I will have your voice trained.'

'Oh! that would be lovely! If I could but play, I should be happy all day. Are you going to remain here?'

'I—I don't know.'

Anne reverted to her thoughts, and again debated the identical question. She wished heartily that she were adapted to take her place beside Margery Payne and Miss

Swanborough, but she was not. She might work with them, forced to it by a sense of duty, but—there was no call. The fire was, as yet, not kindled. The way was not open.

'Tom-Tom,' she said, 'how long were you at Westport?'

'Do you mean altogether, or after father died?'

'After your father's death.'

'About three weeks. The people there were very kind; but, of course, I did not belong to them. They were poor in Tamarisk Row, and they could not keep me. So they found out about Aunt Browne, and sent me away to her.'

'And, Thomasine, did you hear anything about Mr. Marmaduke?'

'The gentleman who was blind?'

'Yes. Was he quite blind?'

'It was very sad. And they said that he was not well off, and would have to give up his business.'

'They said that?'

'Yes. I was interested, hearing of him, because I was blind also.'

'Tom-Tom, who was with him, attending to him?'

'I do not know.'

Anne drew her head back into the shadow of the mantleshelf, and asked in a low tone, 'Did you hear how he lost his sight?'

'Yes, miss, he blowed himself up with gunpowder.'

'You heard no more than that?'

'No, miss.'

Again silence ensued, and Anne breathed hard. She was thinking of Westport, picturing to herself Mr. Marmaduke's house there, and him, groping his way out of the door, and down the steps.

Presently she said, 'What did your father call you?'

'Tommy.'

'But I heard him call you his little girl.'

'Yes—and now I am your little girl.'

'Indeed you are.'

The child caught Anne's hand and covered it with kisses.

A change had come over Anne. A warm spring breath had passed over her heart, and it had grown soft. The tender shoots of good-will, pity, love, were thrusting to the surface. Her eyes filled, and something rose in her throat, and choked her.

But still her mind was at Westport, and she thought of Mr. Marmaduke in his

blindness, of his days in solitude, of his lonely evenings, without a book, without a companion, with nothing to occupy his active mind, save unavailing regrets. And he was oppressed with poverty, obliged to throw up his business on which he depended for his livelihood.

And as she thus thought, there came on her as in the rush of a whirlwind, the words of the bishop: 'Why not take a secretaryship? To me it seems that it is for this that you are best calculated.' A current of scalding blood poured through her veins to her brow. She stooped her hot head over that of the child on her knee, and gasped, 'Oh! I wonder!—Oh! I wonder!'

Then came a tap at the window-pane.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE DOOR IS SHUT

THE rapping at the window became more insistent and loud. A voice was audible through the pane, but only a few words of what was said could be distinguished.

''Arf-a-crown. Tommy! Want 'er back.'

Anne looked round, and saw by the reflected light a sodden face against the glass.

The girl shrank against Anne, and clinging to her skirts cried, 'It is my aunt! O miss! don't let her take me away. Oh! please, don't.'

'She shall not remove you,' answered Anne; and going to the window, she pulled the blind sharply down.

This disconcerted Mrs. Browne for a moment only, and then she went to the door, where she worked the knocker vigorously, then pulled at the bell till she had

broken the wire, and finally belaboured the panels of the door with her fists, at the same time vociferating, 'I want my niece. I ain't goin' to be fobbed off with a dirty 'arf-crown.'

Mrs. Wallis slowly ascended to the surface from the depths in which she dwelt. She did not bestir herself. She knew by the style of the knocking that the applicant at the door was not of first-class quality.

She partly opened the valve, and inquired, 'What do you want?'

'I want my niece back again. Give me my Tom-Tom. I ain't goin' to be put off with no lady's 'arf-crowns. I 'm a lone lorn widder, as might be took in 'er bed hollerin' for 'elp, and no one there to hanswer. I might be dead in the mornin', and no one to let the undertaker know. Where 's the lady?'

Anne was compelled to disengage herself from the arms of the blind girl, who was clasping her frantically, and imploring her not to go to Mrs. Browne, who, she said, was tipsy.

'Tommy, I must not allow Mrs. Wallis to bear the brunt. It is an unpleasant business, but I must face it.'

Then she issued forth into the passage.

The moment Mrs. Browne caught sight of her she became furious.

'You calls yourself a lady, you do. I don't call you one, pullin' down the blind right in my face, when I was speakin' genteel and civil. I know a lady when I sees 'er. I 'm a lady myself. I 'ave 'ad good belongin's. My mother 'ad a hofficer to 'er father, and 'ad fifty pounds in the consols.'

'You may as well cease from your impertinence,' said Anne, hot and yet frightened. This was an experience entirely novel to her. 'I am not going to let you have Tom-Tom back again. You gave her to me.'

'But I will. She 's my own flesh and blood. I was a Robinson, and 'er mother was a Robinson afore 'er married Thomas. If you don't give 'er up, I 'll go afore a magistrate and swear agin' you—as you stole 'er away.'

'If you want Tom-Tom back again,' said Anne, 'return the five shillings to me. It was an agreement. Where is the money?'

'I 'aven't it 'ere,' replied the woman, taken aback somewhat, 'I 've put it in the savin's bank. But you 'll 'ave it sure enough. I can't draw it out till next Saturday. Satur-

day you shall 'ave it, sure as I 'm a Browne now and was a Robinson once. But I 'll 'ave my niece back. I want to 'ave my bed made. It ain't been shook up since you took 'er away. And there 's none in the 'ouse to get up and light a fire and get me somethin' warm in the mornin's before I rise, to stay my stomick. She must come 'ome with me, and I 'll send the two 'arf-crowns Saturday.'

'Go away,' said Anne; 'when you return me the five shillings then will be time enough to consider about Tom-Tom going back to Bloater Buildings.'

'I 'll 'ave 'er now!' exclaimed the tipsy woman.

'I will hold no further parley with you,' said Anne. 'Mrs. Wallis, kindly shut the door.'

But Mrs. Browne, who was a powerful as well as a portly woman, thrust herself in against the jamb, so that it was not possible for the landlady to do as desired.

Already people had collected in the street, and were laughing, and enjoying the fray.

Anne waxed alternately hot and cold.

Mrs. Browne noticed that she had got an audience, and accordingly turned in the door and harangued.

'Look 'ere, ladies and gen'lemen! 'ere's a female person as gives 'erself hairs as a lady. As stuck-up a piece of goods as you ever seed in your life. She's been to my 'ouse—it may be 'umble, but 'ome is 'ome be it ever so lowly—and she's carried off my niece. Every one says that servants now be tremenjously dear. It's eighteen pounds and all found, and beer and washin', and Sunday afternoons out, and an 'arf 'oliday in the week. That's what they demand; and this 'ere female person came to my 'ouse, and carried off my niece to make a slave of 'er, to do all 'er scullery and dirty work, and don't offer to pay a penny wage. What do you call that but slavery?—and under the British flag too! Britons never will be slaves—leastways no Robinsons won't. I 'm that there child's lawfully begotten aunt, and I 'm not goin' to stand it. I 've the fillin's of a mother to that there pore orphing, and I 'll stand by 'er to the last drop of my blood. I won't let no aristocrat in petticoats bamboozle and make a drudge of 'er, and 'arf starve 'er, and badly beat 'er, till she 's all over wales, and black and blue and yaller. I was a Robinson afore I was married—tho' I 'm a Browne now.'

'Shame, shame!' shouted some of the audience, and others vociferated, 'Go it, Mrs. Browne!'

Then said Anne to Mrs. Wallis, 'Run for a policeman.'

'No,' replied the landlady; 'leave me to manage her.' Then to the intruder, 'One word, Mrs. Browne. Your eyes are bad, I see.'

'Me? no they hain't.'

'They water.'

'That 's my outraged fillin's runnin' over.'

'They look bad. Mrs. Jones had sore eyes, and she went to the Vicarage, and the parson gave her a cup of best brandy—real Cognac, such as can't be got at the Crown and Anchor. She was to wash her eyes with it, and when that was done, to go again for more.'

'You don't mean to say so!' Mrs. Browne's anger subsided, and a lively interest was aroused in her breast concerning Mrs. Jones. 'Well, now, my eyes be cruel bad. I do allow that. I emptied the pepper-castor into 'em this mornin' by mistake for a rump-steak puddin', and they 've been on fire ever since.'

'Go to the Vicarage, and see what luck you have there,' suggested Mrs. Wallis.

'I will. Thanky', mem, for telling of it,' said Mrs. Browne, and turned away. Mrs. Wallis shut the door.

Anne went again to the sitting-room, and found Thomasine cowering in a corner, trembling with fear.

'You'll not give me up to her?' she pleaded.

'On no account,' answered Anne; then to herself she said, 'I cannot possibly remain here with Tom-Tom, exposed to such annoyance, and with the probability before us of a recurrence of these scenes. I see — the door has been shut behind me. The way will open for me next. Tom-Tom!'

'Yes, miss.'

'We are going to Westport.'

CHAPTER XXVII

EXCHANGE

ANNE left No. 4 Windsor Terrace next day for the Vicarage. She calculated on finding the parson there. He was free at mid-day, when the children left school, and the work-people poured from factory and dock-yard for their meal; and his rounds would not recommence till two o'clock.

The housekeeper said that he was within, and showed her into the dining-room, where the cloth was laid.

Then she went into the study, and announced that a lady desired to speak with him.

He came forth at once with a pipe in his hand. He had but just thrown himself into his armchair, and he looked weary.

'Ah, ha! you here again, Miss Quillet?' said he. 'Come with me into my snuggery, and we will have a talk.'

'If you will promise to go on with your smoke.'

'You do not object?'

'Not in the least.'

He placed an easy-chair for her, and seated himself, and fixed his eyes upon her. It was his way with all who had interviews with him. He searched their minds with his penetrating dark eyes. Then in his wonted abrupt manner, he said—

'Go on. What is it?'

'I have come to say good-bye. I am leaving St. Giles.'

He nodded.

'I see what a work is being carried on here, and that you are underhanded, but——'

'All right. You do not see your way to becoming one of the staff of helpers. I never supposed that you would.'

'Why so?' asked Anne in surprise.

'I can tell almost at a glance. I have so much experience with so many people that it has become part of my business to read their characters. I know that you are a thoroughly good girl, and that your heart is in the right place; but it does not follow that you are suited for the slums. There are many fields open beside this trampled

and dirty one. The way has not as yet been made plain to you.'

'In a measure you are right,' said Anne, 'and in a measure you are wrong.'

'How so?'

'I did not tell you everything the other evening. I informed you of two only of my neglects. There was yet a third. I chanced to come across a porter of the name of Thomas—not here, but at a place called Westport—and he asked me to visit his daughter, who was suffering in her eyes.'

'Ah!'

'That is not all. He had trundled my luggage to its destination, and refused a half-crown I offered him. He said he would rather that I should look at his child's eyes, and pass an opinion on them. I promised, but I did not go.'

'And that was Tom-Tom?'

'Yes; and the man was killed, crushed by a train whilst in the discharge of his duty. Then the station-master told me to run and break the news to the poor child, and I did not go.'

The vicar said nothing, but he looked intently at Anne's working face.

She went on: 'I thought only of myself.

I did not care to undertake the office thus thrust on me. I wanted to get away by the next up train.'

Still the vicar said nothing.

'But I have found Tom-Tom now.'

'Yes, she is here.'

'And I am fulfilling my promise at last. The way has opened, and I will do all that lies in my power to make amends for my former neglect, and the broken engagement to the father. I have removed her from her aunt's house.'

'I had that woman here yesterday.'

'Yes, for brandy—best Cognac.'

The vicar laughed.

'You did not give it her?' asked Anne.

'Certainly not. She was in liquor when she applied. I cautioned her that I would set a constable to watch her; and if she were found in the street misconducting herself, that she would be taken to the police-station.'

'I am going to take Tom-Tom away. It is not possible for me to retain her in the same place where is her aunt.'

'No, that would never do.'

'Before leaving here,' said Anne with hesitation, and colouring, 'I have to ask of you a favour. Will you grant it me?'

'I must first be told what it is.'

'No. You should trust a lady not to ask of you what it is not right or becoming of you to grant. Come, on your chivalry, make the promise.'

He demurred a moment, then smiled and said—

'Well, then, I promise.'

'It is this, vicar. I have been informed that the bishop, by declining to countersign your application to some society for assisting poor clergy, has deprived you of a grant for twenty-five pounds. Is it so?'

'Yes. I shall be unable to get away for a holiday in the summer; that is all.'

'Then'—she rose and put an envelope into his hand—'I will make it up to you. Take your summer run. You need it more than the bishop does his constitutional after lunch. I can afford it. I have private means; and if it signifies anything to me—this sum—it is merely that I shall have to do without some ball-dresses—and other frocks. And as I purpose living very quietly this year, and going out into no society, I shall not want the fine feathers. I intend to try to live not wholly for myself, but for others—and you cannot do me a greater kindness than by putting a stamp

on my good resolution by accepting this trifle.'

'I never accept anything without making some acknowledgment,' said the vicar after a pause; 'and—wait a moment!' He rose and went to his library-table, opened a drawer, took out something, wrote a few words on it, put it in an envelope, and handed it to Anne.

She looked at him in surprise.

'It is a ticket of admission to the Eye Infirmary,' he said. 'I have for some time been desirous of doing something for Tom-Tom; but her aunt has been obstructive. I have looked at the poor child's eyes. Her lack of sight ensued after an attack of scarlet fever. I believe that an operation in her case will, if not cure her, at all events vastly improve her vision. Mrs. Browne was not amenable to reason, and, unhappily, I have been so run off my legs of late, owing to this epidemic of diphtheria, that I have not been able to attend to Tom-Tom's case as I had wished. I am glad that now she is in your hands. I am quite sure there is nothing I could give you that would please you better than this ticket, with the assurance from me that I believe the child can be cured.'

Anne's great brown eyes expressed more than she could utter.

'Just one thing,' added the vicar. 'Do not raise hopes in the girl which possibly may not be fulfilled.'

'We are quits,' said Anne; 'but, indeed, the greater obligation is on my side.'

'Miss Quillet,' the parson said, 'you remember what I told you in our former interview. If you are sincere, then the way will open before you unmistakably. So go on, and be of good courage.'

She rose — she heard the housekeeper clattering the dishes in the adjoining room — took his hand, and thanked him in broken words.

She hastened back to Windsor Terrace.

'Thomasine,' said she, 'we must part for a while.'

'You are not going to send me back to aunt?' asked the girl in terror.

'No, no, never. But I am about to go to Westport, where I shall look out for lodgings, and for something else on which I have set my heart. Whilst I am busy about this I must be alone; and I am going to take you to the Eye Infirmary, where you shall stay till I send for you.'

'My father,' said the girl, 'told me there

was a nurse going to look at my eyes—but she never came.'

'Some one better than a nurse will examine them; a doctor who has made the maladies of the eye his special study.'

'Do you think he will be able to do anything?'

'I cannot tell—we must hope for the best.'

'You really wish me to go?'

'I do.'

'If you wish it, I will go anywhere; only not to my aunt again. I would rather die than that, if I might die in your arms.'

'Tom-Tom! don't talk of that. It will not be for long.'

'Then you will come and fetch me to you?'

'As soon as ever I can. My child, do you suppose that now I could bear to lose my little girl?'

CHAPTER XXVIII

I WILL RISK IT

ANNE sat in Mr. Tolcher's surgery at Westport awaiting him. He was momentarily expected home. Her appearance in hat with feathers and flowers, and in a fashionably cut dress, was so different from that it had presented in her nurse's uniform, that she had passed unrecognised by the station-master, nor had the porter known her who had taken her trunk to the cloak-room, there to be left till called for.

Westport looked different to Anne, as she walked from the station. She had seen it enveloped in snow; now the land was clear. There were no trees to speak of, the apologies for them were mere sticks bent inland, like umbrellas blown inside out. The very hedges curled over like breaking waves from the sea blast, to protect the tender buds. The eglantine was in leaf, and the dandelion shoots had unfolded their

toothed leaves and here and there a yellow flower blazed on the lee-side of a bank.

Rooks were active. They had no nests so near the coast, but they collected material for their construction from far and near. It was other with the excited and pert jackdaws, they built in the cliffs and the belfries, and multiplied prodigiously. They also were everywhere and made noise. But the most notable indications of spring were the masons, who had shaken off their winter torpor, and were in full activity.

Piles of bricks had risen on bits of land that was torn and churned into mud by waggon wheels. Scaffolding bristled in all directions by the roadsides. A barge at the wharf was discharging lime, which was dribbled along the roads leading to the spots where men were working, as though they had been engaged in a sort of paper-chase. Labourers were digging foundations, were mixing lime with the sand from the shore to serve for mortar and plastering; regardless of the certainty that such a compost was certain to 'give' at every change of weather and temperature. That, however, was no concern of contractor or builder, it would be the affair of the tenants, and

would find endless employment for paper-hangers. Other men were toiling up ladders with hods on their shoulders. All were chattering as rapidly and as noisily as rooks and jackdaws.

It was obvious that Westport was a growing place. If that had been visible in midwinter, it was convincingly shown by the activity now displayed in extending it. Houses that had been erected a year previously were already occupied, though scarcely dry; and numerous boards were displayed in fields announcing that eligible building lots might there be purchased. Any one with half an eye could see that Westport was a seaside resort that had a future. There is a fashion in watering-places as in bonnets, and flowers, religion, and novels, and fashion was setting in a strong current upon Westport.

The terrible tripper would be there in locust swarms, to the benefit only of the publicans and the eatinghouse-keepers, and the boatmen. But the splendid golf-links would attract holiday-takers for the season; and there was a rapidly growing body of residents for the entire year.

The old monopolies held by the chemist, the grocer, and the coal merchant were

being broken through, and the prices were becoming lower through competition.

Mr. Tolcher entered the surgery, with the set smile of bonhomie that he usually adopted towards a patient. Anne rose and bowed. He looked at her, and his eyebrows went up. His expression lost suavity and became stern.

'So! *You* back again. I should have expected that you would have the decency to keep away from Westport for the term of your natural life.'

'My name is Quillet,' said Anne.

'I had forgotten your name, but not your face. I am not likely to forget that. What has brought you here, in the name of Mischief?'

'I am not surprised at your thus addressing me,' began Anne.

'I have heard of ghosts revisiting the scenes of their crimes,' said the surgeon.

'And why not the living?' asked Anne. 'May not a troubled conscience impel one to do that?'

'Well,' he said, slightly mollified.

'I have had an uneasy mind since that day when you spoke to me such true and scathing remarks. Every word you then uttered stabbed me to the heart. You did

well. There was much bad blood lodged therein that had to be let out.'

'Sit down'; he signed to a chair, and his manner became gentler. 'I dare say I expressed myself too harshly. I was very angry.'

'You said nothing that was not true. It was because true that your words cut deep. If they had been undeserved, they would have glanced off.'

'Miss——'

'Quillet.'

'Yes, Miss Quillet. I am thankful that you have come, glad that you have been moved to visit me. Henceforth, I shall think differently of you. Are you staying here?'

'That depends largely on yourself.'

'On me! How so?'

'In the first place, tell me, how is Mr. Marmaduke?'

'He is out and about, enjoying his usual robust health. As to his sight, he is totally blind in one eye, and with the other sees too imperfectly to be able to read.'

'And how about his business?'

'That is a bad job. He has very small private means. He had bought a partnership in a legal firm, that had started a

branch here which he was to work up. He cannot continue in this, and will have to resign. What he will do, I cannot say.'

'But, why not keep a clerk, to read to him the deeds—I don't know what their names are—conveyances, indentures, leases, and so on, and to write from his dictation. If his brain is clear, he might still act.'

'That is all well in theory; but consider the cost of an extra clerk. That would be a hundred, or a hundred and fifty per annum, out of the business, and it is not sufficiently flourishing here in Westport to justify the outlay. Besides, Miss Quillet, he will require some one to assist him out of office-hours, to read his daily paper to him in the mornings, to keep him in the current of literary life; there are weekly, monthly and quarterly reviews, there are the books of the day—he is not a man who will be content to be left in an intellectual back-water. And to engage a reader and amanuensis as well as an office-clerk would eat up his income.'

'I have considered this,' said Anne. 'It is because I have seen that this is requisite, that I have come to Westport and have called on you. I solicit your good offices. I offer myself to Mr. Marmaduke. I will do

everything I can for him. I will read to him the musty deeds; I will write from his dictation what he desires to have engrossed by his clerk; I will be his secretary both in office and at home.'

'My dear young lady this cannot be. You don't know what legal documents are. You would be sick of them in a week.'

'I would undertake it, if you will give me the opportunity. I shall have only to look at him in his helplessness, if ever a rebellious feeling swells in my heart, and a sense of distaste sweeps over me, and I shall buckle to my task with zeal.'

'No, my good lady, it won't do.'

'Why not?'

'You are too young.'

'The more reason why I should be pliable, and be able to shape myself to the task.'

'I do not mean that. A housekeeper, a secretary, must live in the house.'

'Not at all. I will go in for an hour after his breakfast and for two every evening when he has left his office—that will be for private reading and for his private correspondence. In the office I will do clerk's work. Who is with him at present? Who manages his house?'

'No one. A sister-in-law of Mrs. Basileg

was there whilst he was ill, but she departed when he recovered. However, he has a trusty and honest cook.'

'And the faithful Polly?'

'The faithful Polly is gone. Her mother died, and her father recalled her to attend on him. But consider, Miss Quillet, if Mr. Marmaduke learned that it was you who had neglected him, he would not be disposed to trust you again.'

'Need he know? Polly would recognise me, but she is gone. The cook I do not think saw me. Although Mr. Marmaduke and I had had some talk together, and I told him my name, it is probable he has forgotten about me, as he was feverish and half delirious.'

'That is true.'

'Has he alluded to me since?'

'No; and what is more, we have not spoken to him a word relative to your—'

'Betrayal of a sacred trust.'

'He knows nothing of that now, but it is not to be expected that he will not hear of it.' The surgeon considered. 'I don't think that any one else would recognise you, your appearance is so altered. I saw more of you than did others. But what about salary?'

'Actually, I require nothing. I have a little income of my own. I wish—I desire with my whole heart—to make such amends for the past as lie in my power.'

'Some salary must be paid,' mused Mr. Tolcher; then he added, 'But how if this be a mere freak. What guarantee have I that you will not weary of it in a fortnight, and chuck the whole concern?'

'I can offer no other guarantee than this,' said Anne. 'I have inherited my mother's jewels. They are worth many thousands of pounds. I will put them into your hands, and forfeit them if not faithful to my self-imposed task.'

'I cannot take your jewels. I could not retain them if you failed. I must have something better than they—your word.'

'That I solemnly pledge.'

He looked at her; his plain, pock-marked face softened.

'Hang it, I'll risk it! Go in and have tea with my wife whilst I visit Marmaduke, and propose it to him. Yes, by Jove, I will risk it.'

CHAPTER XXIX

THE WAY OPEN

'COME along!' shouted Mr. Tolcher, 'I have broken the ice. I 'll conduct you to Mr. Marmaduke. I didn't tell him your age, for I never undertake to estimate that of a woman. All I said was that you were staid and no chicken. I represented you to him as a lady with small means; who would be glad of a little work that would bring her in from forty to fifty pounds, and that this would make the difference between straitened circumstances and comparative ease. I know no more what your income is than I do your age. Forgive me, Heaven! if I am wrong. Come on!'

Anne at once rose.

Her heart beat high with hope. The way, as the vicar of St. Giles had foretold, was opening.

'I shall leave you with him,' said the

surgeon; 'I have some professional visits to make. But you manage preliminaries between you. I assure you, he quite sprang at the offer.'

Anne looked at the steep slope near the house, where had been the snow-slide. It was a grassy field now. Under the hedge shone one primrose, like a star. She thought how that, when she had resolved on taking to her the blind child, she had looked up to heaven and had seen one bright spark there. And now this primrose shone on her as a ray of hope, and recognition that her resolve was approved.

The door was opened by a maid who had replaced the faithful Polly, and she showed Anne into the drawing-room, and asked her to take a seat. Mr. Tolcher had departed, leaving Anne at the door.

In a minute she heard Mr. Marmaduke approach slowly in the passage, and then his hand tentatively groping for the handle.

He entered, walking with head erect, and looking straight before him. He did not turn it seeking for her.

'How do you do? The lady, I presume, mentioned by Mr. Tolcher? Pray, remain seated.'

Till she moved, he had not known whereabouts in the room she was, and when he did, he turned himself in her direction, and not his head alone.

'It is very good of you,' he said, and felt for a chair, and took it.

'Not at all, sir!' replied Anne; 'I applied to Mr. Tolcher, with whom I have had some previous acquaintance, because I was embarrassed, and — I may say distressed — wanting employment such as would become a lady with a smattering of education.'

As she spoke, she saw him make a slight gesture as of surprise.

'I beg your pardon,' he said; 'have I seen you before?'

'No, sir; I am sure that you have not.'

'Do you live in these parts?'

'No. My home has been in another part of England. But my father has married again, and it is not convenient for me to live with a stepmother, not at my age.' Anne could not refrain from a smile as she said this. 'So I am on the look-out for remunerative employment.'

'It is most thoughtful of Mr. Tolcher. But he is a good fellow. I owe him a debt

of gratitude for much beside this. Excuse me, I have not had your name.'

'Quillet.'

'Quillet!' he repeated, and remained silent. A puzzled look came over his face. 'Very odd. The name does not seem to me wholly unfamiliar. And yet—'

'There are several cousins on my father's side scattered up and down England. One, I know, is in the legal profession.'

'Oh! it may be that. But there is something in your voice—but it must be a mistake. Curious! There are times when I feel disposed to believe—or rather suspect—the pre-existence of souls, and that we have lived a former life, of which faint wafts, reminiscences, come to us. Things said, scenes viewed, incidents recur to us in a startling manner, as though we had seen, heard, experienced them at some unknown time before. Search, rack our memories as we may, we cannot recall the when, the where, and the how. Have you experienced this, Miss Quillet?'

'Never, sir.'

'I could almost have sworn that we had met previously.'

'In no former condition of existence that I can recall,' said Anne smiling.

He was a tall, fine, and strongly-built man, with a broad intellectual brow. His eyes had that abstracted look in them belonging to the blind, the iris neither contracting nor expanding. He wore at this time much hair about his mouth. Since his illness he had given up shaving; and the hair was dark, almost black.

'Are you living here alone?' he inquired after a while.

'At present I am, but I shall shortly have a little girl with me—you may have heard of her. There was a porter, named Thomas, on the line, who during last winter was killed.'

'I heard something about it.'

'He left a girl of thirteen, who had cataract in her eyes.'

'Ah!' he became much interested.

'The child had no relations here, only a wretched drunken aunt, living at a distance, who neglected her. She had a tie on me. I was responsible for her in a way, and I have adopted her.'

'No sort of——'

'Oh no, not a relation, but I was morally responsible for her. So I have adopted Thomasine, and have sent her to an eye-infirmary, where she is now. When discharged, she will live with me.'

'Come, come!' said Mr. Marmaduke, 'we shall get on together. You have sympathy with the blind. You know I am that, in consequence of an accident.'

Anne made no other response than a bow, which he did not see.

'Now to the point,' he went on. 'You intend to reside here?'

'Yes. I have been told that one can live here very economically, and the girl will be of some domestic use to me, as I trust that her sight will be restored at the hospital.'

'I hope it will,' he responded, and sighed. 'None but those who have lost it know how great is the privation. And you are so good as to offer to assist me.'

'For a small remuneration,' said Anne, her eyes twitching. She was happy, happy at the prospect of being able to be serviceable to this man, and it brought smile on smile to her lips. Had he been able to see, he would have been perplexed at the light that danced in her brown eyes.

'The state of affairs is this,' continued Mr. Marmaduke; 'I must either keep a clerk in my office to interpret business to me, or else I must give up my partnership.'

'And,' said Anne, 'you require a Nerissa:—

> "A kind of boy, a little scrubbed boy,
> No higher than myself, the judge's clerk,
> A prating boy."'

Mr. Marmaduke laughed. 'You know Shakespeare.'

'Alas! not well. But we had, at home, an amateur dramatic society, and we gave the *Merchant of Venice*.'

'But you were, surely, Portia.'

'Indeed, no. I was not tall and dignified enough for such a part as that. I was Nerissa, and that gave me a smack of law, enough to produce in me a longing to have more.'

'It is dry stuff in the mouth.'

'But I shall wash it down with light literature.'

'Not such with me. If you read to me, it will be solid works.'

'Well, I am content. I have fed hitherto on flummery, and nothing but flummery. I suppose that a wholesome mind should grow, and for that meat must be given, matter to digest other than the mere froth of everyday fiction.'

'I am convinced that we shall agree,' said Mr. Marmaduke. 'And now, rather

than suppose that we should have met in a previous state of existence, I think that I must have had a prevision, or dream, that you were coming to help me. It is so at times. Not only do coming events cast their shadows before them, but gleams of a rising sun are thrown forward before it bursts on one's happy eyes.'

'You are expecting too much,' said Anne. 'I shall be of little assistance for some time to come, stumble painfully over your deeds, making hash of your law-terms, and perhaps dragging clumsily along the course of your heavy literature. You will need to be forbearing.'

'May I ask a further question. What is your Christian name?'

'Anne.'

'Anne!' he repeated, and again a perplexed look came over him. 'I wish that my eyes were unsealed for one moment that I might see you. I have a confused conception of what an Anne is like.'

'You have no ideal Anne?'

'I had one, but it is blurred and gone from me. However, that is perhaps as well. I will make a *tabula rasa* of old fancies and prejudices concerning Annes. There can be no doubt henceforth that my

ideal Anne will be one most useful and kind to me.'

She coloured and laughed :—

'A kind of boy, a little scrubbed boy.'

'No,' said he, and laughed also. 'A very bright and delightful Nerissa. I will imagine you as that.'

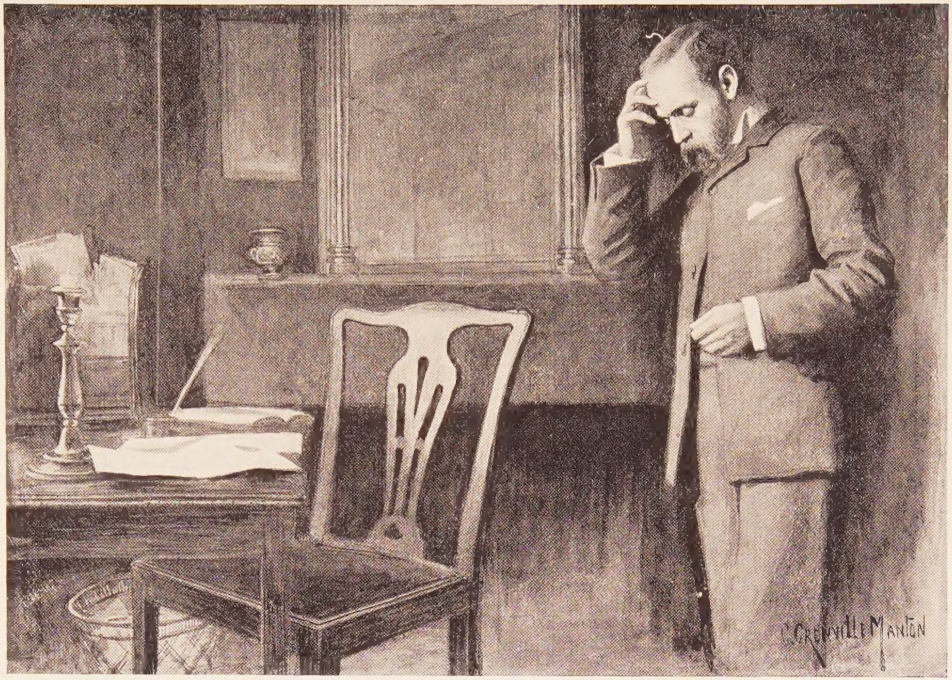
Anne rose. 'Then, sir, we may conclude that the arrangement holds.'

'Stay,' said he; 'not a word has been spoken relative to the acknowledgment on my part.'

'True,' retorted Anne; 'let it be a pound a week, or fifty pounds if paid quarterly. If I prove disappointing, unsatisfactory, not worth my pay—a month's notice. Now, as to when I begin my duties. I have to take a cottage here—furnished lodgings for myself and the little maid, Thomasine. That will not occupy much time. Shall we say the day after to-morrow?'

She bade farewell, and crossed the room to leave. He would have opened the door for her, but she was too nimble for that.

When she was gone, he stood in the room, put his hand to his head, and said, 'It must have been in dream. The step, the name, the voice, seem somehow to recall



"THE STEP, THE NAME, THE VOICE SEEM SOMEHOW TO RECALL SOMETHING"

something, and to be familiar, as coming to me from out of another world, the world of dreams, may be. Where does recollection end, and dream begin? It is strange, wondrously so to me. Well, we are such stuff

> "As dreams are made of, and our little life
> Is rounded with a sleep."'

CHAPTER XXX

THE LAWYER'S CLERK

ANNE had found furnished lodgings that looked out on the sea, and were not near the canal and dock which exhaled unsavoury odours. She had a civil landlady; and out of the season the rent was not high. If she kept on the rooms, she would be required to pay double prices at the time of influx of visitors.

She received encouraging news of Tom-Tom from Margery Payne, who had been to see her. The surgeon at the Eye Infirmary gave great hopes of a cure. An operation had been performed, but the child was not to be allowed to leave till all danger of inflammation was over, and her eyes were sufficiently strong to bear the full light of day. Anne was very happy to hear this, and she communicated the tidings to the landlady, who could inform those who had interested themselves in Thomasine Thomas, and had been kind to her after the death of

her father. Mrs. Browne received regularly her allowance of half-a-crown a week, paid through Margery; and though she expressed dissatisfaction with the amount of the dole, she greedily clutched at the money and speedily spent it. It furnished her with a ready means of getting tipsy and making a disturbance in the street, for which she was taken up by the police, and consigned to prison for a week.

When Mrs. Browne discovered that Thomasine had recovered her sight, she became offensive, and blustered, declaring that she would have her back. Margery, however, calmed her by the assurance that the child would be returned to her when she refunded the five shillings and sent the railway fare from Westport, amounting to twelve and fourpence. As this was a sum the lady was quite incapable of raising, she thought it advisable to drop her claim.

Anne speedily settled into her work at the office. If it were dull, it had its compensations; and by degrees she arrived at a comprehension of the technical jargon of the law. She found that there was a grim humour in the legal twists and subtleties. A good deal of business came to the office connected with the sale of plots of land and

the drawing up of contracts, not in themselves interesting, and not requiring more than clerical work, but it served for her training.

She visited Mr. Marmaduke after his breakfast, and read to him the telegrams and leaders of the day, leaving parliamentary debates till later. In the evening she was with him for two hours previous to his dinner, and read to him such works as interested him, and which he procured from a library in London to which he subscribed.

Thus the weeks glided away, and spring stole on with softer air, brighter skies, and longer days.

Thomasine arrived, with the use of her eyes. The girl's delight at being with Anne was extreme, and Anne's heart glowed with affection for the child. She set her to work, to be useful, and help the landlady, whilst she was away from the house; and when she came home, in the evening, she taught the girl music, and set her scales to practise during the day whilst she was absent. This constant occupation gave Anne real pleasure —time no longer hung heavy on her hands, and as she laid her head to rest on the pillow, it was with the happy consciousness

that not an hour of the day had been wasted, and would go into the rubbish-heap of Time.

With the milder weather, and extended hours of daylight, Mr. Marmaduke went forth for constitutionals. He was dependent on friends to accompany him, and these were uncertain. Anne proposed Thomasine, and the offer was readily accepted. Thenceforth the child became an associate when he went his walks, leading him along the cliffs, over the downs, through the lanes, across the sands—places he could not have ventured on unattended.

Thomasine had many friends in Westport, and to them she sang the praises of her protectress, of which she never wearied. She told how miserable had been her lot with Mrs. Browne, and how that Anne had rescued her from this condition; how that she had done more than this, by sending her to the infirmary, whereby she had had sight restored to her eyes. The consequence was that wherever Anne went she was met with friendly nods and salutations. The shopkeepers had pleasant words to say to her about her *protégée* or relative to Mr. Marmaduke.

This was a new experience to Anne. It

was something different from the servility shown by tradesmen at Guildstone. The regard shown her had no respect to her custom—it was deference, proving esteem.

In a small place, especially a watering-place, that passed into a condition of delirium in the season, and where time hangs during the winter and early spring, there every one is concerned about the affairs of every one else. But when the influx of visitors arrives, every thought, so long as it lasts, is absorbed in catering for them, and the affairs of neighbours fall out of the landscape.

But if Anne had won the regard of the middle and lower classes, there appeared no evidence that the select upper society in Westport was prepared to welcome her.

Society in Westport asked, Who is Miss Quillet? Was she a person with whom it was desirable to become acquainted? What were her belongings? Whence came she?

Certain ladies looked at certain other ladies to move in the matter, to call and to report. A whisper passed from one to another that her father had turned her out of the house. He would not have done this had her conduct been irreproachable. Some suggested that possibly the father had misconducted himself, and made it impossible

for his daughter to remain with him. Before cards could be left, the matter should be cleared up. It would certainly be advisable to delay before committing what might be a regrettable and irretrievable indiscretion—by calling. She could not be a social acquisition, as she was obliged to act as amanuensis and reader, so as to earn her livelihood.

The gentlefolks of Westport entertained a prejudice in favour of moneyed people, and looked down on such as worked for their bread. These might be worthy enough in their way, but belonged to a lower rung of the social scale, and classes are as castes, you cannot break bread with one of an inferior order without compromise of dignity and infringement of caste. It was, doubtless, good of this young person to take up a porter's orphan, but there were orphans, well born, who were in poor circumstances, to whom the preference should have been given. It was injudicious of Miss Quillet, if actually a lady by birth, to make much of a child whom all Westport knew to be of the humblest origin. It was bad for the girl to be elevated to a position she was not qualified to fill, and to teach her music, and pay a professional to instruct her in singing

was absurd, and showed criminal lack of judgment.

Moreover, Anne Quillet was unmistakably pretty. The mothers with marriageable daughters were resolved to exclude her from select society lest she should enter into competition with their darlings. The gentlemen were favourably impressed with Anne, and were incautious enough to say so. In church, on the golf-links, on the esplanade, she attracted their eyes, and not those of the bachelors only. The wives and matrons observed this, and hardened their hearts against Anne.

'Have you made many acquaintances?' asked Mr. Marmaduke one day.

'None at all,' answered Anne indifferently. 'The rector has called, but not his wife.'

'Do you mean to tell me that the people have not left their cards?'

'They have not.'

'I will alter that,' said he, and set his lips. He was annoyed. 'I am going a walk this afternoon with Captain Sleep, and I'll mention it.'

'You had much better not,' urged Anne; 'men cannot manage these matters, they only muddle them.'

'Leave it to me.'

But when Marmaduke did meet Captain Sleep, and spoke of it, the latter replied, 'My dear fellow, what is to be done? It won't avail for me to urge my wife to call. She will turn restive at once, and up with her heels. You don't understand what women are. Nobody knows who Miss Quillet is. Do you?'

Mr. Marmaduke was obliged to admit his ignorance.

A month elapsed, and his interference, so confidently undertaken, had proved ineffectual. He grew kinder in his manner to Anne; he was hurt on her behalf; and he appreciated more and more daily how important, nay, indispensable, her assistance had become to him. But it was not her help alone that he valued. He had his times of depression, and these she lightened with her sunny temper.

All at once the whole situation changed. A young lady arrived on a visit to friends at Westport who knew about the Quillets at Guildstone. That Anne was a lady was established beyond question. Her father was son of the late Earl of Nankeville, and her mother daughter of a baronet.

'Lionel,' exclaimed Mrs. Sleep, 'what a stupid man you are, so unobservant and uninquiring! Fetch me a *Peerage and Baronetage* at once. Can it be possible that she is there?' After some fumbling in the book: 'Fancy! in both. *She!* Good gracious, Lionel, you crawl like a beetle!' And, sure enough, under the head of Nankeville (Earl) came a notice of the Hon. Edward Quillet, second son of Henry Augustus, sixth earl, Colonel in the Guards, who married Anna Maria, daughter of Sir Ryeburd Rowlandson, of Rowland Hall, Bart., and had issue three daughters, Anne, Victoria, and Florence.

Never before had there been such a demand in Westport for the *Peerage and Baronetage*, and immediately a snowstorm of cards descended on Anne's lodging.

As she was returning in the afternoon from the office she was waylaid by Mrs. Sleep, who extended a hand, and gushingly said, 'My dear Miss Quillet—so awfully sorry not to have made your acquaintance earlier. But the weather has been so cold and stormy. I have been laid up off and on with bronchitis. I know you will forgive me. I have a little reception on Thursday. Now do, do come, there is a dear creature,

and I will introduce you to our innermost circle, to our most select set.'

'What does this mean?' asked Anne when she returned to her lodging, and found the table piled with visiting-cards. 'All the world of Westport has taken it into its head to make the acquaintance of the lawyer's clerk.'

CHAPTER XXXI

CAPTAIN GREGORY AGAIN

ON the following morning, when Anne went to Mr. Marmaduke's house to read and answer his private letters and give him the substance of the contents of the daily paper, she found that one of the epistles that awaited her was from Mrs. Basileg. It was as follows :—

'My dear Brother,— Dotty has been very unwell of late. She has had a cold and cough which she is unable to shake off, and Ernest looks peaky and seems languid. I purpose, therefore, with your good leave, to bring them with me to Westport, and inflict ourselves upon you for three weeks or a month. I trust that the sea-air will set them up again. I hope it will be quite convenient to you. Excuse haste. The doctor says that it is the best thing I can do for them. You will be surprised to see

how your nephew and niece have shot up.—
Yours ever, LETITIA BASILEG.

'*P.S.*—So glad that you are all right again. I had a kind note to that effect from my friend, Mrs. Sleep.'

Anne was alarmed at this letter. Mrs. Basileg would certainly recognise her, and then—as she expressed it to herself somewhat vulgarly—the fat would be in the fire. She read the letter aloud to Mr. Marmaduke, and made no comment thereon, but with no little trepidation awaited what he would say.

'I cannot have them here—indeed I cannot,' said he impatiently. 'My sister has no consideration; she idolises her children and expects for them general adoration. She would sacrifice every one to them. Why, good heavens! the peace of my house and the smooth tenor of my life would be broken if she brought those pampered and insubordinate imps into my house. Besides, she is one of those meddlesome women who drive servants to desperation. I should have cook and Susan giving notice, and perhaps yourself, Miss Quillet, declining to give me further your invaluable service!'

'That is not likely, Mr. Marmaduke.

The work, with its salary, is to me a necessity.'

'Well, I won't risk it.'

'What excuse shall I make?'

'Say that Mr. Tolcher does not approve. I will talk to him about it and secure his opinion against this proposed infliction. I will not be bothered with those children and run the chance of an upset of my household. My sister is an excellent woman in her proper place.'

Anne breathed freely, and wrote an apology in the most courteous terms declining the honour of a visit from Mrs. Basileg and her children.

'By the way, Miss Quillet,' said Mr. Marmaduke, when the letter was sealed, 'there is a Captain Gregory here with his sister. They have just arrived, and are staying at the Truemans. They are cousins a long way removed, still cousins of mine. Captain Gregory will be here this afternoon and stay the evening with me, so I must excuse you from coming here for the latter part of the day.'

'Captain Gregory!'

'Do you happen to know him?'

'Yes, we have met.'

In the afternoon the captain called at the

office, and was shown in. He saw Anne there, and saluted her with some surprise.

As he walked away with Mr. Marmaduke, 'I say, Richard, old fellow,' said he, 'what is the meaning of this? I had heard that you had got Miss Anne Quillet as secretary, but I could not believe it, till convinced by seeing her writing from your dictation. I rubbed my eyes. How the deuce did you contrive it? By Jove, I cannot understand it. She is very comfortably off, at least I have been led to suppose so, and in no need of employment. Of course she does not slave as private secretary and lawyer's clerk for love.'

'You know her and her family?'

'Yes, I do. I have a great admiration for her. Between you and me and the post, I proposed to her once, but she put me off. The moment was inopportune. There had been a domestic upset. Her father had married a woman not quite of his position in society, though, I believe, fairly well connected; she was a sort of finishing governess, a domineering, strutting creature, and great on teetotalism. This led to a break-up of the family. I did not choose my moment happily, when

I made my offer. I will do better next time.'

Marmaduke lowered his chin on his breast.

'You begrudge me your amanuensis, old fellow,' said the captain; 'but, on my soul! you can't suppose that a girl of her style and good looks—'

'Is she good-looking?'

'Uncommonly so—with lustrous eyes that sparkle with intelligence. Such a girl as that is not likely to stick to this sort of drudgery for long. There is positively no need for her to do so. I don't know how the money is settled, whether the Colonel, her father, controls it, and has cut off supplies in resentment because she does not take to and choose to live with her stepmother; but that must be settled before long, and she will have enough to live on where she likes in comfort. In any case she would not remain with you. So, old boy, be prepared to lose her, and if you have to surrender her, you cannot do better than give her up to me.'

'Then you intend to try your luck again?'

'Of course I shall.'

'It is the first of April to-day.'

'I will risk that. Already I hear a great many eyes have been on her.'

Richard Marmaduke heaved an involuntary sigh. It was a sad prospect for him to be deprived of one who had become of extreme importance to him.

'Of course, old boy, you cannot in reason expect to retain her. Fancy her, Miss Quillet, acting as a sort of lawyer's clerk to you! It is inexplicable.'

'Yes, she has been that.'

'And are you aware who she is? Her father is the Honourable Colonel Quillet, formerly of the Guards: she is an earl's grand-daughter. It is clean ridiculous! The old chap may have buttoned up his pockets, and for the nonce she may have felt a pinch, but this cannot last, and when he pulls out his purse again, she will make her courtesy to you and leave. Do you not see this?'

'Yes.' Richard Marmaduke raised his head and looked before him. His face was drawn, and his lip quivered.

'You must not be cross with me if I carry her off,' continued the captain, 'seeing that it is impossible for you long to keep her in your employ.'

'I suppose it is impossible.'

'Absolutely so. Why, bless your five wits, Richard, those Quillet girls—there are three of them—must each have at least four hundred a year of their own, though the Colonel may be able to withhold it for a while. Of that I know nothing, but I suspect as much, or else, why should this Anne be put to such shifts as to take a secretaryship? You don't imagine that a girl with four hundred a year will remain in an office as lawyer's clerk for life?'

Marmaduke was silent.

'And you can't swear her to celibacy, old fellow. Such a good-looking girl, and one with money, is bound to be snapped up—and I will have the first try. I'll go at once and see her. Wish me good success, my boy.'

'With whatever she wills, I am content,' answered Marmaduke.

CHAPTER XXXII

SCALES

ANNE was seated near the piano in her lodgings giving Thomasine a lesson thereon when Captain Gregory was announced.

She rose at once to receive him.

The girl desisted from her work, but Anne made a sign to her to proceed.

'I am afraid I am disturbing you, Miss Quillet,' said the visitor.

'Not at all,' she replied; 'I am giving this little puss her hour; and we can converse whilst she goes on with her scales.'

Captain Gregory looked disconcerted.

Anne saw it, smiled, and said, 'I have become a busy woman since we last met. I have to dovetail my tasks together into the few hours that I have free from office-work. As you saw, I am secretary to Mr. Marmaduke, the solicitor.

'So I understand—so I saw. I can't understand it. What can have induced you?'

'There, captain, you trench on my private affairs. I had my reasons, sound ones, and let that suffice. How is my father?'

'He is well, I believe.'

'Is my sister Florence at home?'

'Yes; she has had to return, and is restive. I wish, Miss Quillet, I might be allowed a little chat with you alone.'

'O Captain Gregory! you do not know what a rap over the knuckles I received last time we met for having had a *tête-à-tête* with you. I dare not risk it again.'

'But I really desire to have one word in private with you.'

'Come by the window. Thomasine will not hear; she is engrossed in her scales. B, B, B flat, Tom-Tom, you always forget; and play a natural.'

Anne seated herself at a distance from the piano, but so as by turning her head to command her pupil.

'It has nothing to do, I trust, with the matter discussed at our last interview.'

Captain Gregory looked with dissatisfaction at the strumming child.

'I had hoped—that is I trusted—'

'That the matter was settled for ever and a day,' said Anne. 'How is Frank Dearmer? When I left he was seriously

ill, and in danger. That was a bad touch of his lungs; and how poor Mrs. Dearmer must have suffered, so wrapped up as she is in her only boy.'

'Oh, Frank! he is all right again.' The captain again glanced at Thomasine.

'Do not let her disturb you,' Anne said; and then, with a turn of her head, 'You have that fingering all wrong, Tom-Tom. How often have I told you not to use the thumb there. Now go on, Captain Gregory; tell me all about the Seagrims. Did they lose a great deal of money in that bank smash?'

'They have suffered, and will have to leave Guildstone.'

'I am so sorry. They are not people who will know how to cut their coats according to their cloth.'

'Do suffer me to have a little private talk with you,' pleaded Captain Gregory, in a low tone, and moved his chair closer to Anne. 'There was some difficulty, I quite understand that now, your father's marriage and a trouble with your stepmother, and the uncertainty as to your future movements, and—in short—'

'F, B flat, A, G, D, "The Bluebells of Scotland," Tom.'

'But,' proceeded the visitor, 'that is all

cleared up now, and you may be disposed to give me a different answer—'

'Thumb again, you naughty girl.'

'—a different answer, Miss Quillet. If I might—for two minutes—damn that piano!'

'Please do not let it interfere with what you have to say.'

'Are you in the same mind, Miss Quillet? or will you now allow me to hope?'

'I never change my mind. Don't thump, Tom.'

'But—surely you cannot intend to remain in Westport, in'— he looked about the room —'in such very primitive quarters?'

'That is my affair. I have not the smallest intention of quitting Westport.'

'What can be the inducement?'

'The sea air does me good. I like the place. As you see,' she pointed to the mirror, which was stuck about with cards, 'I have had plenty of callers, and may have as much society as I like. But, indeed, I shall be able to afford little time for that. I have to educate this girl, whom I have adopted, and I see that she has a fine voice, which must be cultivated. Then I have, to fill in my time, the law-work at Mauger and Marmaduke's office, and I can assure you— Play that bar again till you get your finger-

ing right—that I am getting quite a legal head, and find a zest in law-work.'

She was talking to put him off. He was not one to accept a hint, however broad.

'Do you really again—hang that piano! —refuse me?' said he, coming to the point.

Anne nodded.

'Pray do not be vexed over-much,' she said. 'The child must repeat her scales till she has learned them by heart, and, Captain Gregory, is it necessary for you to go over the same ground again, only to assure yourself of a No?'

'Confound it!' said the captain, as he walked away; 'inopportune again. I should not have proposed on All Fools' Day.'

CHAPTER XXXIII

A WOMAN'S HAND

ON the ensuing day, when, as usual, Anne went to Mr. Marmaduke's house after his breakfast, she noticed that he looked careworn and ill. She said nothing, however, and proceeded to read the newspaper to him, and then saw that he was paying little or no attention to what was read.

He was abstracted also in the office, and appeared to be suffering. Anne became concerned. When she called in the evening he was in his study, sitting motionless, with face drawn.

She said to him, 'I am sure that you are ill, Mr. Marmaduke.'

'No, indeed, I am not. A little out of tune. I did not sleep last night.'

'Why not? Has anything occurred to trouble you?'

'We have all our peck to bear, I as well as others.'

'But of what nature are your cares? Is it such that I can assist in relieving it?'

'Every one has his days of ups and downs.'

'But this is prolonged. You have been depressed throughout the day. I cannot leave you thus. It is not caused by Mrs. Basileg's letter, and the refusal sent, is it?'

'I should rather rejoice that I was out of that infliction.'

'Then you are unwell. I will summon Mr. Tolcher.'

'On no account; there is nothing the matter with me that he can cure.'

'Then it is certainly due to something Captain Gregory said.'

'He prepared me for the inevitable break that must ensue in our relations, Miss Quillet. I did not know, till he told me, that you had good private means, and have been in no way obliged to take employment.'

'And that has brought the clouds down upon you?'

'No wonder. What have you not done for me?'

'O Mr. Marmaduke! I have done for you—you know not what.'

'I do know. You have been to me hand

and eyes. And now I shall be bereft of both.'

'Captain Gregory had better attend to his own concerns. He knows nothing of mine. He builds on the idle chatter of a country town. I consider it a piece of impertinence in him to meddle between you, sir, and me. Will you believe me when I assure you, and it is the truth, that your service has been, and still is, and will be, necessary to me. It has relieved me in a time of great distress.'

'Temporary difficulty, it may be, but that will pass.'

'Not at all. It remains. Captain Gregory has not been vouchsafed to look into my affairs. You do not want to be rid of me, do you?'

'O Anne!—I beg your pardon—I mean Miss Quillet.'

'Call me Anne. Do abandon the formality that has reigned between us.'

'Do you mean this, Miss Quillet?'

'There you are, frozen up in ribbed ice again. I am Anne.'

'I have always thought of you, when alone, as an Anne.'

'Then you have thought of me?'

'Indeed I have. I continually think of

how good and kind you have been to me, and of the miserably inadequate return I make. But I cannot think of you as tied to the drudgery of the law for more than a brief period. You are young, and, in all probability—indeed Captain Gregory hinted as much, but, of course, I have no right to intrude into your private affairs—in all probability you will be changing your condition, and that I must expect and be prepared for.'

'Captain Gregory has been over officious and over confident. Put him out of your thoughts as completely as I do out of mine. I will not desert my situation as lawyer's clerk, and I remain in your office till you turn me out for incompetence and neglect.'

'O Anne! Do you mean this?'

'Before Heaven, I do.'

The front door was opened. Firm steps sounded in the hall, and in came Mrs. Basileg flourishing an umbrella in one hand, and carrying a handbag in the other. She was in hat and mantle.

Anne was sitting back, and the lady did not at first observe her. She advanced, charged upon her brother in towering excitement.

'Richard! What is the meaning of this? A lady's hand!—a letter in a female hand—

an impudent and audacious interference, I call it! declining a visit from me and my lambs. You never intended that. It was done for you by some one who did not wish to have me here. I knew the sense of it the moment I saw the handwriting — a woman's hand. Who is she? Where is she? I will unearth her. Writing your letters, indeed! interfering between us! trying to rob my poor darlings of the sea-breezes. I 'll ferret her out. I 'll have no females here, of whom I know nothing, and of whom I do not approve.'

She whisked her skirts about, and faced Anne. For a moment she stood, speechlessly staring at her, in some doubt; but like a flash came recognition.

'Richard! *she* here! She—she has the effrontery—she, with her nurse's costume cast aside! Oh, I know her. I see through her. I 'm not a prophet, I suppose. Oh dear, no! I never saw what she was driving at, and what it would come to. Oh-ho! indeed.'

'Letitia'—Mr. Marmaduke had risen—'keep a civil tongue in your head. This is Miss Quillet.'

'Quillet! Quillet! I 'll Quillet her. I know all about her. I have eyes in my

head. She to dare to present herself again after what has taken place! I 'll tear off her veil. I 'll expose her.'

'Mr. Marmaduke.' It was now Anne who spoke; she also had risen. There was anguish in her tone. 'Oh, pray!—pray do not let her tell you. Allow me to speak it. Give me three minutes alone with you, and you shall know everything. Now everything must come out.'

'Hoity-toity! indeed!' burst forth Mrs. Basileg, whisking round again. 'Richard, I—'

'Letitia,' interrupted her brother, speaking firmly, 'I insist. Go into the drawing-room for three minutes. She desires it.'

'She! she, indeed!' in a tone of scorn. 'Remember, I am your sister.'

'And this is my house. I will be obeyed in it. Leave me for a short space, and then you shall be welcome.'

'A pretty state of affairs this! I to be turned out of my brother's room for the sake of an adventuress, an insolent, designing trollop.'

'Leave us immediately,' thundered Richard Marmaduke, and pointed in the direction in which he supposed the door to be.

With a parting sneer, 'Minx! adventuress!' Mrs. Basileg swept from the room.

She did not shut the door after her; Anne accordingly went to it, and made it fast. Then she crept back to where Mr. Marmaduke had cast himself into an easy seat.

She stole beside him, threw herself on her knees, and clasped her hands about the chair-arm. He heard her breath come fast, and in jerks, as though she were sobbing.

'What is it, Anne?' he asked gently.

'I must now tell you everything—my shame, and wickedness.'

He turned deadly white, and trembled.

'I was afraid that some day or other it would come out; but yet I hoped—I hoped against hope.'

She looked into his pallid face, and her head sank on her hands folded about the arm of the chair, which she clasped.

'O Mr. Marmaduke! It was I, none but I who was your nurse, after you had met with that dreadful accident. I was so thoughtless, so frivolous, so bad. I did not keep the trust committed to me. I was told not to let you get into conversation with me when you were feverish, as it was

bad for you, and you had taken morphia. But I found it so tedious in the night, in the sickroom, that I encouraged you to talk, and next day you were much worse.'

He drew a long breath.

'But that was not all, not nearly the most serious of the wrongs I did. I had to be with you in the daytime also, and your eyes were bandaged, and the blinds drawn; on no account were you to be allowed to see a ray of light. Time did so drag; I was so weary; and I heard laughing and talking without; and because you were asleep I thought it could do no harm if I drew up the blind. And it was a season of dazzling snow, and they were tobogganing outside on that long slope beyond your house. I felt such a longing for a slide that I ran out, and had two sledge rides down the run, and I had forgotten to lower the blind—and'—she spoke in quick, short sentences, with a sob between each—'and when I came back you had waked, and had torn off your bandages, and were sitting up in bed staring with your poor eyes at the glaring snow, on which the sun shone.'

She paused.

He had folded his hands before him on his breast.

She caught at his left arm.

'You can never forgive me. It is I—I who blinded you. They turned me out of the house. They turned me out of the hospital. I went home, and Captain Gregory, who did not know it was I—I who did that, told me he had heard of what had happened, and he said that such a woman was a selfish pig, and a disgrace to her sex. It was true, and I have had no rest, no happiness since—till I came here, and you allowed me to do what I have done for you. It has been my atonement; a poor one, but the only one I could make. Do not—oh! do not drive me away. I cannot give you back your eyes. I would tear mine out, and let you have them, if that might avail, but it will not. So—oh! let me be to you what I may as a help to you —always.'

'Anne!'

'Yes, Mr. Marmaduke.' She raised her flushed and tear-stained face.

'Anne, it is not enough. I require more of you.'

'Everything. I will be everything you ask.'

'Then, Anne—'

She understood him, staggered from her

"YOU CAN NEVER FORGIVE ME. IT IS I—I WHO BLINDED YOU"

knees, and lay in his arms, against his heart.

'Anne,' said he, 'the ideal Anne shall be to me more than an idea; she shall be my own Anne, my real own.'

'Oh! Mrs. Basileg!' she gasped, 'the three minutes must be long gone by.'

'Yes; go to her and call her in.'

'No, Richard; that would offend her—you go.'

'We will go together.'

CHAPTER XXXIV

WHAT ?

BUT when Richard Marmaduke and Anne entered the drawing-room, they found that Mrs. Basileg was not there.

Indeed Mrs. Basileg had not deigned to enter that chamber, where she was to wait on Anne's convenience.

When she had sailed out of the study, she had purposely left the door ajar. She was not going to allow her brother to be subjected to the machinations of a designing woman, without her interference. Not she! Blind he was. All men are blind when they have to do with scheming women. Richard, as doubly blind, must be taken under her special protection. Who would not release a poor fly caught in the web of a spider? Who not break the snare in which a bird was entangled? When Mrs. Basileg saw the door shut in her face, every atom of compunction departed from her. Go into the sitting-room and sit there

twiddling her thumbs! not she. So she went forth, and passing round the house, stood before the study window.

Had Anne's eyes not been suffused with tears, and her gaze, when they were lifted, not been directed intently on Mr. Marmaduke, she would have seen the lady standing outside the window, observant of all that went on within.

No sooner did Mrs. Basileg satisfy herself that intervention on her part would be futile, than she whisked about her skirts, and proceeded into Westport, walking fast, shaking her handbag as though it were the head of Anne, held by the hair, and flourishing the umbrella, with ferocity of manner, as if it had been an executioner's sword wherewith she had decapitated the traitor.

'I 'll make it hot for them,' exclaimed the lady. 'I 'll spoil his practice for him, and shut every door in Westport against her. That is what I shall do to those who treat me thus. I 'll come down with Dotty and Ernest, and take lodgings, and teach the dear children to walk past their uncle and ignore him.'

Mrs. Basileg pursued her way, in the same wrathful and remorseless mood, till she reached the door of the house of Colonel

and Mrs. Sleep, when she administered a sharp rap, and in a peremptory tone asked for the lady.

She was shown into the drawing-room, where she was welcomed with real or affected cordiality by Mrs. Sleep. In society the quality of such greetings is indistinguishable.

'So delighted to see you, my dear Mrs. Basileg; the person of all others I wished to see. And how are you, and your sweet children?'

'Thank you, I am pretty well—as well as family troubles will allow. Dotty has had a heavy cold, that has settled on her chest, and I am most anxious about her; and Ernest is growing too fast for his strength. But, O my dear friend! if it were only care for one's children that weighed on one. There are others and graver.'

'Surely Mr. Basileg is well?'

'Oh, he is always that. There is, there can be, nothing the matter with him. You see he keeps such regular hours; he is at his office punctually at ten, and then has a light lunch at one, and is home after four, and takes a little walk in the park, and we dine at half-past seven. I am not thinking

of him, but of my poor Richard—my brother.'

'I have seen him about, and he takes a walk occasionally with the colonel. He has, moreover, fallen on his feet lately in securing a most able amanuensis.'

'Oh, amanuensis!' Mrs. Basileg tossed her head: 'amanuensis, and clerk, and reader all in one.'

'I believe so; most fortunate.'

'Oh! indeed. And, pray, why did she come here, and offer herself to him?'

'Well, it is strange, but I understand from the Gregorys that there was some domestic rumpus, and she had to leave her home, and for a time take employment.'

'Oh, indeed! for a time—take employment.'

There was a tone in Mrs. Basileg's voice, an air which she assumed, a toss of her nose, that led Mrs. Sleep to suspect a mystery. With keen zest after such things she eagerly inquired, 'But, my dear Letitia, do you really know anything about her and this rumpus. There were indeed rumours; some said that the father was to blame, and some said it was her fault. So nobody called.'

'They did right,' said Mrs. Basileg

sharply. 'I do know what she is—a designing, audacious adventuress. Who will say that the days of prophecy are at an end? I am inclined to become an Irvingite and proclaim that the gift has fallen on me. I said it, months ago. I foresaw what would happen, and I spoke it plainly, but none would hearken. And now, my dear friend, the first woe is on us'—she lowered her voice—'she has hooked poor Richard. Like an octopus, she has her arms round him, and will drag him down. She will marry him.'

'But,' said Mrs. Sleep, 'do you know who she is?'

'Do I know? Of course I do. I know what all these crafty creatures are, and whence they spring. She is, doubtless, some petty tradesman's daughter, tired of serving toffee and acid drops over a counter; and oranges, and ginger-beer at three-ha'pence a bottle; that is whence they come, these nurses. They go into a hospital, and put on bonnets and veils and mantles, and then go out a-hunting after patients or doctors whom they can entangle in the meshes of matrimony, and so get a lift in life, and into respectability. I don't relish, I can tell you, having a needy, beggarly

gutter-girl brought into my family. I shan't know her, nor shall Dotty or Ernest, nor my dear husband, if he can get away from business and come here for a change. We will not recognise them, not we!'

'My dear Letitia,' said Mrs. Sleep, looking surprised, 'you are labouring under a great mistake. She is by no means what you say—beggarly.'

'Beggarly, of course she is. Why, else, should she make such a dead-set at my poor brother, Richard? A blind man is not so great a catch. But if he has position, even that of a solicitor, and family, as he has, being my brother, he is a catch to such as she.'

Mrs. Sleep rose; the *Peerage* lay open on the table, she thrust it under the eyes of her visitor.

'Read that, Letitia. Miss Quillet's Christian name is Anne.'

Under the head of Nankeville (Earl), Mrs. Basileg read:—

'The Hon. Edward Quillet, second son, late Colonel in the Guards, married Anna Maria, daughter of Sir Ryeburd Rowlandson, of Rowland Hall, Bart.; and has issue:—

'Anne.

'Victoria.

'Florence.

'Residence—Guildstone. Club—Army and Navy.'

'What?' gasped Mrs. Basileg.

'And,' said Mrs. Sleep, 'I have been credibly informed, indeed I have it on first-rate authority, that she has something like five hundred a year of her own.'

'What?' and Mrs. Basileg's jaw fell.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE END OF MISS QUILLET

'Guildstone.

'MY DEAREST ANNE,—Such a packet of news—sad and joyful—such a jumble of it, that, really, I must tell you everything in order of occurrence, or I shall run grave and gay into inextricable confusion. You know that our Amateur Dramatical Society was to act *Macbeth*. I was to be Fleance. Papa never liked my taking what he vulgarly termed "breeches parts," but I never saw anything against it, —do you?—and every one said I would look lovely—just lovely—in it. Well, there was to be a witch's caldron that was to sink amidst red fires into the earth. It would be awfully weird. We had a dress rehearsal on the Monday, and proposed rehearsing again on the Tuesday and Wednesday. The grand performance was to be on Thursday—all in the Town Hall. By some stupid neglect, we had not secured the hall for the Tuesday

and Wednesday. We left all our properties in place on Monday, and then discovered to our confusion that the hall had been booked by others for the two days we required previous to the performance. On Tuesday there was to be an Anti-something-or-other meeting, presided over by some noble lady, supported by his lordship; and on the Wednesday the hall had been secured for a temperance meeting, with an address, will you believe me! by the Hon. Mrs. Quillet. The chair to be taken by poor dear papa. Fancy him brought to that. It is too funny for words. It spoiled our rehearsal, but the Dearmers, with whom I am now staying, and I made up a party to see the show. Well, I need not describe Number Two's harangue, nor retail the horrible examples recorded; and after that poor papa had to get up, and he stroked down his grey moustache in an abject manner, and proceeded to say that for fifty years he had been accustomed to his pipe and his glass, but had of late renounced both, and never felt better in his life—never better,—and I nearly cried.

'Well, Number Two went ambling backwards, I can only describe her motions thus, in order to make room for another speaker,

when there ensued a scream, and she vanished. By some means, some hideous fatality, the bolt of the trap for the descent of the caldron had not been shot, or had been so indifferently, and down into the abyss went poor Number Two! Then there was such a disturbance. Papa and some other Temperites crowded round the black hole and looked down into it, to see what had become of her, and no one knew what was the way to get in under the stage, and the gentlemen were afraid of jumping in at the trap, lest they should jump on the poor thing who was below. At last the proprietor of the hall, or custodian, or whatever he is called, was found, and he got in and hauled our stepmother out of the witch's caldron, and she was frightfully injured. Of course there was no more lecturing, and *Macbeth* also had to be postponed. I went at once to our old home, to inquire, and offer papa to remain with him. I found him in the study as well as might be expected under the sad circumstances, taking a surreptitious pipe, and he had rung for a tumbler and sugar and hot water. He was quite unstrung, and needed something.

'The doctor made a bad report, and I

fear it will be a fatal case. How it was that the Anti-something-or-other rabble on the platform did not go down alive into the pit on Tuesday is to us all a wonder. But is it not awful?

'Really, papa bears up heroically.

'Now I have told you the horrors; I will give you something of another kind.

'What do you think? I am engaged, and that to Captain Gregory. He is the most charming man I know. Fancy, Anne, he had the cheek to tell me he had proposed to you and had been rejected. That was just his way to excite me to jealousy, but I know the tricks and the ways of these men. I don't believe one word of it. He tells me such funny things about you. I think he is trying to take a rise out of me, and see how great is my gullability. But, tell me, what are you doing? Our marriage cannot, of course, come off because of our stepmother's condition, but she cannot last long. Fancy tumbling into the property caldron, that was to contain eye of newt and nose of unbelieving Jew. But it is awful; and papa is quite a pattern of resignation.

'Your ever-loving sister,

'VICTORIA.'

At the church of Westport there was morning prayer daily, attended by from six to a dozen ladies. The hour was nine. One morning, whilst the dearly beloved congregation was engaged on the Psalms, in alternate recitation with the parson, Mr. Marmaduke entered, led by Thomasine. This produced a flurry among the responding ladies, and they got adrift in their verses. But when, two minutes later, Colonel Quillet entered with Anne on his arm, then the responses failed wholly, and the vicar and his curate had to conclude the Psalm between them.

Usually, so soon as matins was over, the congregation formed a little parliament outside the churchyard gate to exchange salutations and to pass the news. But on this occasion, not one of the six ladies present made any movement to leave the church.

They were rewarded by hearing the marriage-service performed. After the conclusion of which, the vicar, his curate, and the clerk, followed by Mr. Marmaduke, with Anne now on his arm, and by Colonel Quillet, adjourned to the vestry.

There Anne was called upon to sign her maiden name for the last time. So—with-

out orange-flowers, without rice, without an old shoe thrown, even without best man and bridesmaids — the story of Miss Quillet came to an end.

Printed by T. and A. CONSTABLE, (late) Printers to Her Majesty
at the Edinburgh University Press

A CATALOGUE OF BOOKS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS OF METHUEN AND COMPANY PUBLISHERS : LONDON 36 ESSEX STREET W.C.

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